

GOLDEN LIVES: THE STORY OF A Woman's Courage



BY

FREDERICK
WICKS

WITH

120 ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

JEAN DE PAELOGUE

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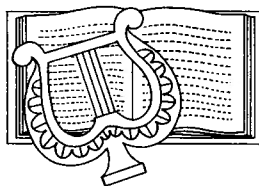
A very lively story, crammed full of incident.—*The Times*.

Clever character drawing. Teeming incident. Flowing style.—*Vanity Fair*.

The plot is developed with care, precision and completeness.—*Saturday Review*.

W. BLACKWOOD & SONS, EDINBURGH & LONDON.

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In Memoriam

Ruth Candler Lovett

1935-1964



GOLDEN LIVES :

THE STORY OF

A WOMAN'S COURAGE.

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THE STORY OF

A WOMAN'S COURAGE.

BY

FREDERICK WICKS,

WITH ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

JEAN DE PALEOLOGUE.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD & SONS,

EDINBURGH AND LONDON.

MDCCCXCI.

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I DEDICATE THIS BOOK
TO
THAT BUSY, EAGER, RESTLESS THROG
WHO HAVE NO TIME,
IN THE HOPE THAT
JUST IN THE SAME WAY AS I HAVE ENJOYED SOME OASES OF CALM
IN THE MIDST OF A VERY BUSY LIFE BY WRITING THIS STORY,
SO THEY MAY PROCURE A LITTLE DISTRACTION IN READING IT.
AND SEEING
THAT THE MULTIPLICATION OF WORDS IS TIRE SOME
HAVE ENDEAVOURED TO USE AS FEW AS POSSIBLE
AND MUCH
THAT IN THE ORDINARY WAY WOULD BE SAID IN
LONG PARAGRAPHS OF DESCRIPTION
I HAVE CONVEYED THROUGH THE PENCIL OF ANOTHER,
WHO, SUFFERING VICARIOUSLY, HAS PATIENTLY ENDURED
MY DETAILED DESCRIPTIONS OF EACH INCIDENT,
AND,
WITH ADMIRABLE FACILITY AND INDUSTRY, HAS GIVEN TO MY IDEAS
PALPABLE CONFIGURATION.

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 POSTSCRIPT.

GOLDEN LIVES.

CHAPTER I.

SAMUEL SHORTER REVISES HIS CORRESPONDENCE.



It was the custom of Samuel Shorter to accumulate his correspondence in the various pockets of his black frock coat, and, when opportunity offered, to revise the contents of his pockets by destroying what was of no longer any use. If a fire were near at the time, he would burn the rejected letters ; but his favourite time for unburdening himself was a railway journey, when he could tear the letters into small pieces, and scatter them to the winds. It chanced, therefore, that, sitting in a corner seat of a third-class carriage on the Midland Railway, he went through his pockets, as he travelled South—"for," said he to himself, "what is more like to oblivion than a Yorkshire moor?"--and he commenced tearing up vigorously on leaving Appleby.

The wind was in the East, and it was strong ; and as there were five other people in the carriage, he had to consult their prejudices in the matter of East wind. But, having persuaded his fellow-passengers that a little air was necessary, he lowered the window two inches at the top, and gave a handful of fragments to the winds. Some letters he tore up in large pieces, and threw them out at once ; others he tore and re-tore

and scattered in two or more portions, and a close observer could have determined the confidential character of the communications he disposed of by the size of the pieces to which he reduced them before giving them to the winds.

Samuel Shorter was not a nice-looking man. He was tall, and thin, with round shoulders, and a sly look; about fifty years of age, clean shaven, with close-cut red hair, colourless eyebrows, freckles in abundance, and thin, compressed lips.



His eyes were grey and usually half closed, panther-like; and though methodical in his manner and apparently engrossed in what he was doing, he every now and then took a rapid survey of his fellow travellers. There was a steady, business-like persistence in the care with which he examined each letter. His face was not an index to his thoughts: it was a blank. But as each letter disappeared through the space above the nearly closed window, his thin lips became thinner and more firmly set, and his half-closed eyes seemed almost entirely to disappear. Shorter's friends

well knew that this was his way of expressing satisfaction with himself and his works. The young girl, of an observant nature, sitting opposite to him, thought it a very disagreeable way; and despite his clerical garb, his studied propriety, and his conciliatory speeches, she shrank from him. He reminded her, as he went stealthily through his correspondence, selecting, and destroying, and dispersing, of one of those wild animals in the Zoological Gardens, restlessly busy and terribly energetic; but not for good.

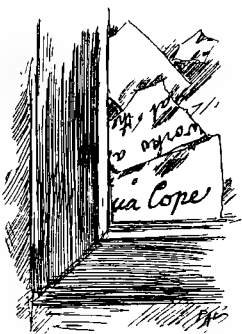
"There's the last," said Shorter, as he sent a batch of paper flying; "and now we'll shut the window. There's nothing like a railway train for dispersing correspondence."

But a Yorkshire moor was not oblivion. It happened that the wind was driving with considerable force almost at right angles to the train; and as the fragments of Shorter's correspondence left his hand they scudded along the sides of the carriages, rattling against the windows as they passed, and spreading out like a fan, some going over the top of the train, some passing under, and other pieces sticking on the handles of the doors and other projections, pinned there by the wind. It chanced that among the passengers amused by the flight of the Shorter correspondence was a solitary occupant of a first-class carriage, named Joseph Eales, who raised his eyes from his book at the sound of the paper clattering on the glass. Eales was a young man of strikingly accurate features, an excellent row of teeth, dark brown hair, and almost black eyes of singular keenness. He wore a travelling suit, and appeared to be of an amiable disposition, yet capable withal of pursuing a purpose with unfaltering determination.



Having looked at the flying fragments curiously for some moments, he remarked that some pieces were occasionally for an instant held flattened against one or other of the windows, and then, as he attempted to read what was written upon them, they would, from some change in the current or force of the wind, dash away on their wild career. Some pieces remained

longer than others, and as he watched them, wondering how long they would hold there, another volley fluttered past, beating against the windows ; when, suddenly as if he had been the subject of an electric shock, his face assumed an appearance of vigorous determination. Another square inch of paper had struck the window and become fixed, partly by the wind, and partly by being pressed into a chink in the frame. Upon it, in a bold handwriting, were the letters
"ua Cope."



It was the name that startled the solitary traveller, and, throwing his book away, he rapidly let down the window. The next moment he had the piece of paper in the compartment together with the blank that had still retained its place, but the other pieces had been dispersed and rested somewhere on the line among the grey stones and the sleepers, a very wilder

ness for the concealment of scraps of paper, but still not oblivion.

"Wonderful!" was the exclamation that fell from Eales as he held the two pieces of paper in the palm of his hand. Then suddenly putting them in his book for safety he put his head out of the window to watch whence the paper came. In another minute he had a shower in his face from the second compartment from his own. Then they ceased.

"Good," said he ; "and where are we?"

The landmarks were few The district was desolate ; scarcely anything was visible but grey rocks, all broken and serrated, cropping up out of the grass, with low-lying hills in the distance. A few solitary sheep grazed about a quarter of a mile from the railway, but neither man nor habitation was to be seen. As he examined the dreary prospect the train passed on to a viaduct with a stone wall on either side. This was sufficient. Eales gathered his things together, strapped them up, and with cool deliberation broke the apparatus for causing the train to be stopped.

The driver pulled up in the midst of a barren waste before reaching the small station of Ribbleshead, and engineer, guard and passengers were naturally inquisitive. Eales threw his

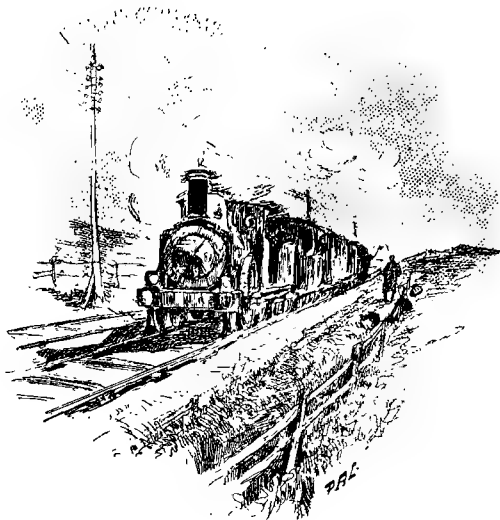
packages from the carriage, and quickly followed them. As the guard approached him he produced his card case and said firmly:

"That is my name and address. It is necessary I should leave the train. My luggage will go on to London, and I will answer for the stoppage to the Secretary of the Company."

The guard seemed annoyed, and was tempted to remonstrate, but the firmness with which the traveller announced his determination seemed to impress him. He asked for his ticket which he impounded, on the plea that it did not authorise a traveller to break the journey at that place, and then waved the engine-driver to proceed. As the train moved off, Eales stood face to face with Shorter, but neither knew the other. If anything, Eales had the advantage, because he knew the torn letters came from the compartment in which the man with the blanched face sat, and it was fair to assume that it was from his hand and not the girl's that the fragments were thrown from the window.

The train was very soon a mere speck in the distance, and Eales, having placed his wrappers against a block of stone, set off down the line to the place where the papers he was more particularly interested in were thrown from the carriage. He had undertaken a difficult task without much surety that the result would be useful, even if accomplished; and when he had crossed the long bridge with a wall on each side, and looked over the grey expanse beyond, he began to doubt whether he had not been a little rash in delaying his journey to London for an entire day, with a chance of a twenty mile walk before he came to a house, all for a thing that might prove to be quite useless.

The sleepers of the line were laid in a grey stone, that, at a distance, was almost identical with the colour of the paper he



had in his hand ; and a steady scrutiny right and left, zig-zag fashion, for fully five minutes, gave no trace of a scrap of paper to the keenest pair of eyes in civilised man that ever searched upon the ground.

It was useless to repent. The train was gone, and he slowly continued his walk with bent back and a frowning brow. At length he descried a piece of paper standing up against the rail. It matched the colour of the two pieces he held, but it was a blank. Still it gave him confidence. He had arrived at the spot where the fragments fell. He found another piece, this time with writing on it, and another. He became excited and energetic. A Yorkshire moor was not oblivion !

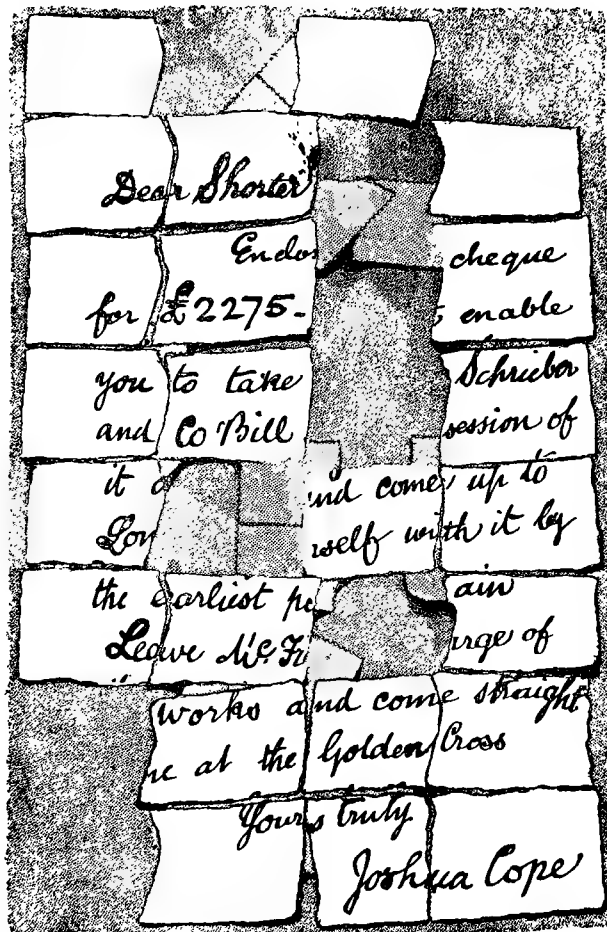
Carefully placing the pieces in a pocket book as he picked them up, he continued the search for two hours, and then had enough to make it worth while to examine them. The high



wind troubled him, but he happened to have two shillingworth of postage stamps in his pocket book, and, shielded behind a low wall, he was able to select the outside pieces of the letter and stick them on to the back of the stamps. He then made up part of a second row, and a third, and a fourth. The letter had been torn into thirty-two pieces, twenty-three

of which he had found. Several of the missing pieces were obviously blanks, so he wanted only five to make the letter complete.

When he had pasted together all the pieces he had found the fragments made an interesting piece of patchwork, of which a representation appears below



CHAPTER II.

JOSHUA COPE'S PARTNER.



MR. CRAWLEY FOYLE was a profuse man. Big, almost to grossness, loud and demonstrative in speech, exuberant in protestations of affection or denunciation, extravagant in opinion, eager, excitable, and violent—a sort of social whirlwind. If repose had been possible, he would have been accounted handsome. His iron-grey hair was abundant and wavy, his nostril and lips were full, and his eyes sparkled with animation. His garments were capacious, but not otherwise singular; he eschewed diamonds, but was remarkable for the taste he displayed in

antique jewellery. He was a Member of Parliament for Buckton, and lived in Eaton Square.

Mr. Foyle's name was William, but he strove to forget it. He used the "W" only, because he hoped that, by persistent endeavours, he might induce the public to endow him with a hyphen, and that he might become Crawley-Foyle to all the world.

Crawley Foyle manipulated mankind by gastronomy. He believed in the dinner party as the greatest social engine of the nineteenth century. In commerce, as in politics, he relied upon his cook; and his commercial relations were complicated. Being eminently a pushing man, he was mixed up with many enterprises—a director of several companies, and was supposed to have money in various private firms. His office was in the Minorities, where he appeared as Schreiber

and Co., and as a marine victualling contractor, generally known as a ship chandler. He preferred those businesses that ministered to the animal wants of his fellow men, and he was ready to purvey anything that could be eaten or drunk, for any number of people, in any part of the world. Being lavish in expenditure, he was commonly supposed to be wealthy: as a matter of fact, he floated on a sea of debt.

"Debt," said Crawley Foyle, when performing as a statesman, "is the pivot of commerce." Domestically, and as a merchant, he spoke only of "obligations." The word sounded smoother, and suggested something complimentary and agreeable. He had many of them, and from the way in which he spoke of them one would almost have thought he was rather proud of the possession; still he steadfastly refused to add them up, or regard them in any other light than as passing incidents in what he called "the daily round of life."

It was a Wednesday, and Mr. Foyle reached home from the House of Commons by five in the afternoon.

"Bidewell," said he to his butler, "Mr. Cope dines here to-night, and remember he likes Madeira. Get some of the '28."

Bidewell was a small, timid man, with failing eyes and a trembling lip. His excessive anxiety to please made him bold to speak when he would have better consulted his peace of mind by silence. Accordingly he announced by way of correction, "There are only two bottles of it left."

"What of that, sir," exclaimed the member for Buckton. "Cope must have it. You must empty the cellar if Cope wants it! Cope must have everything he wants—do you hear?"

Bidewell heard, and knew from the vehemence of the declaration that Mr. Cope must be his peculiar care. Why the strange, little wiry old man, with a deep scar above his left temple, should be so considered, was a mystery he did not try to penetrate. He knew he was Foyle's partner, and that he was wealthy, but he knew no more.

Joshua Cope was, indeed, wealthy. He made money in many ways, and nearly all of them nasty. He supplied Schrieber & Co. with capital, declined to know what was purveyed, and took most of the profits; he had a nail warehouse near Halesowen, and the misery of the nailers amused him; he had manure works in Liverpool, New-

castle, and Glasgow, where his workmen were paid for holding their tongues, because all the dead horses and diseased cattle he bought were not made into manure; he had been a smuggler in his youth, he said, hence the scar; he had



been all over the world; he was ugly, avaricious, and essentially brutal in his disposition; he was a member of the London Warehouse Tontine Association; he was, in fact, one of the Golden Lives, and he had made up his mind to outlive his partners in that wealthy corporation.

He arrived shortly after Foyle, and handed his hat to Bidewell in a cool, matter-of-course manner, indicating that he was thoroughly at home, and with full command of the establishment. He seemed to be somewhat absorbed in thought, though at the same time thoroughly confident.

"Where's your master?" he asked, rubbing his brown and sinewy hands.

"With the ladies."

"Shew me my room," said Cope; and Bidewell glided forward to do what he knew to be totally unnecessary, for Mr. Cope's room was an established institution, and never varied. This was a second indication to Bidewell that something unusual was afoot. A third indication followed.

"Can you shave?" asked Cope.

"Yes, sir."

"Then shave me."

Bidewell could not but admit that this was necessary. Without being actually dirty, Joshua Cope had an untidy and disagreeable appearance. His brown, weather-beaten skin, the persistency with which his collar disappeared behind his black silk tie, his rumpled shirt front, and his rusty clothes defied all attempts at polish. Still the request was singular, but Bidewell associated it in some way with '28 Madeira, and responded with alacrity.

There was a grim and whimsical smile around the hard,

square mouth of Joshua Cope while Bidewell was absent in quest of hot water. He walked the room in deep and humorous contemplation. He was evidently well-pleased with himself.

As for Bidewell he had a misgiving that while shaving and '28 Madeira came within the same general category of "care of Mr. Cope," yet Mr. Foyle should be informed. He accordingly sought his master in the drawing-room, and furtively whispered that Mr. Cope had desired to be shaven.

"Then shave him, in the name of the Lord!" exclaimed Mr. Crawley Foyle, with his arms in the air, and his whole aspect one of violent emotion. Upon which Mrs. Foyle, a



patient woman of forty-five, nearly upset a cup of tea and exclaimed:

"Oh! William, please don't."

"Don't, my dear, and why not? Mr. Cope is our guest. He wants Bidewell to shave him. Let him be shaved, I say—shave him! D'ye hear?"

Bidewell left without a word, and Mrs. Foyle explained that she had not the least objection, but that William said "such things," and was so excited that she really couldn't help

it. And the poor lady stroked her lap, and seemed inclined to weep.

There was a spectator to this incident—their daughter Isabel, who, when Mr. Foyle essayed to expostulate remarked firmly, but with perfect composure :

“ Papa, don’t be absurd.”

And papa was silent.

Isabel Foyle was a strange product of this curiously dissimilar pair. She was the exact transcript of her father, refined and modulated ; but it was not merely the coarse and florid man refined : she was Crawley Foyle idealised physically and mentally. His light grey eyes were violet in her, his sensuous mouth was merely hinted at, and yet its full ripe curves were eloquent of all that was human. Her hair was auburn in colour and abundant, well cared for and plainly dressed ; her brow was high, and her figure a model of rich womanhood. Dignified in movement, and always composed, she never allowed her feelings to become her master. She was tender and



considerate with her mother, because she was weak ; but she ruled her father imperiously. She would have had some difficulty in analysing her feelings, but there is no doubt she was actuated, probably without knowing it, by the fact that Crawley Foyle was an impostor.

Having checked her father, she handed a fan to her mother and walked to the other end of the room.

Crawley Foyle retired, and there was peace.

In the meantime, Bidewell had Cope in hand, or it would be more accurate to say, Cope had Bidewell in hand, for he made him talk like a real barber.

“ Many dinner parties lately, Bidewell ? ”

“ Not *quite* so many, sir.”

"Much going out?"

"Pretty considerable, sir, but not the ladies."

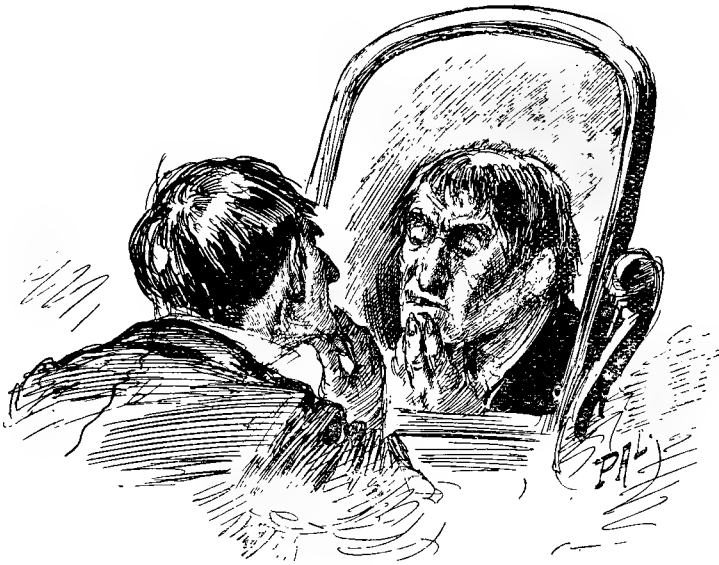
"Seen Mr. Thresher lately?"

"He come on Monday, sir, and he's coming to-night."

"He's a good deal about, I suppose?"

"Oh! yes, sir. He's very attentive; and though I think Mr. Foyle would have liked Miss Isabel to look a leetle bit higher, they're a handsome pair."

Cope gave a grunt that rather disconcerted Bidewell. Failing to interpret it, he dropped the subject, but Cope being



now free to walk about, examined his chin in the glass, as he said:

"She'll jilt him, Bidewell; I'm sure she'll jilt him. Something always happens to upset these nice little arrangements."

"I hope not, I'm sure," was Bidewell's pious aspiration; but Cope gave another grunt, this time obviously a grunt of disapproval.

"You may go, Bidewell," he said.

"Yes, sir, dinner at 7.30;" and Bidewell left with the unpleasant feeling that he had not managed as well as he had desired.

The dinner was a sublime effort on the part of M. Parlou, the French cook, who had been worked up to a high pitch of bad language—in French also—through Mr. Foyle having had an interview with him the day before, and declared that he had never in his whole life cooked anything fit to be eaten. The



interview was stormy in the extreme. M. Parlou declared his honour had been insulted, and resigned his trust with the air of an ambassador, upon which Mr. Foyle became incoherent with rage and left the house. He returned in the afternoon covertly to inquire whether the threat of instant departure had been carried out, and went down to the House of Commons to legislate with a feeling of repose since M. Parlou had resolved to take a noble revenge by surpassing himself. The result was prodigious, but costly. It was M. Parlou's habit in his sublimer moments to commit to the flames all dishes concerning the excellence

of which he had doubts. Two dozen kromesky furnished the fuel for the successful course. The kitchen was a pandemonium, but the dinner was exquisite, and Crawley Foyle was certain he had the finest cook in the world.

Mr. Foyle's party consisted of ten, seated at a round table, over which was suspended a lamp covered by a crimson shade, lined with white satin. Mrs. Foyle was present, dressed in pink, and distressingly pensive. She was escorted by the Hon. Mr. Peach, a Member, and a younger son, who espoused Radical opinions of the extreme type, chiefly because his father was a Tory, and he imagined that he could not be a loser in the event of a general scramble. Her left hand supporter was Colonel Pate, of the Commissariat Department, who was not in the least annoyed because a half-pay Captain, named Percival Joybell, paid special attention to his partner, Mrs. Lupin, a highly-coloured lady of mature years. Her husband sat next to Mr. Foyle. He was pale and fair, and though giving evidence of extreme timidity, had a commercial history which Mr. Foyle would say marked him out as a man

of courage and foresight. He was originally a bank clerk, and having by penurious habits saved a thousand pounds in fifteen years, he purchased the titles to a heavily mortgaged property in Monmouthshire, discovered a mineral spring on it that had never before been dreamt of, advertised a natural effervescing water of great medicinal qualities, made a fortune and retired, by which time the spring appeared to dry up. Cope admired Mr. Lupin, and frequently gazed upon him with genuine satisfaction.

David Thresher, who sat between Mr. Lupin and Isabel, was tall and strongly built, with an abundant flaxen beard and a delicate moustache that showed his lips, dark brown eyes, and a strong growth of short, wavy brown hair. He was essentially a strong man, quiet in manner, determined in purpose, and capable of waiting. Isabel noticed that he was unusually reserved this evening, and resolved to know why. But she also could wait. Cope, who sat next to Foyle, watched them with a keen and at times malignant interest. Her beauty irritated him. She wore a low dress of ruby silk, moderately trimmed with black lace, a camellia in her bosom, and another in her hair. Her sleeves were merely shoulder straps, and the moulding of her neck defied criticism. Full and round, every line was a graceful curve, and the alabaster surface betrayed no blemish either of form or colour.



Isabel was animated. She quizzed the Hon. Mr. Peach, and relieved her mother of the necessity of entertaining the Colonel. That was the understanding between them, and the reason she sat so near her mother. The conversation, however, was general. Foyle broke out into violent political declamation now and then, and excited the admiration of Captain Joybell, who, grey, dishevelled, and generally gone to seed, was elated at the bare idea of being in the company of capitalists, for whom, as a genius, he had a profound veneration.

Captain Joybell was related to David Thresher by marriage ; his presence at the dinner table was the consequence of a recent introduction and the realisation of an elaborate scheme on Joybell's part. The gallant Captain was full of brilliant schemes, that needed only capital to enable him to realise immense fortunes, and Foyle, he knew, was the very man for him. He told Cope so before they had finished the soup, and Cope was inwardly convulsed with delight at the humour of the situation.

Captain Joybell's schemes were all miracles of wealth. Only the day before he had met a man with a gold mine in his pocket in the shape of a concession. A week before, an enterprising German chemist, without a shirt, explained to him a new explosive as harmless as sawdust, of which a pound weight was capable of levelling the Houses of Parliament, while an American of undoubted probity, had placed at his disposal for one week a preferential claim to a great invention for catching fish, by the attraction of the electric light through the glass bottom of a boat ; by means of this expedient myriads of fish could be scooped up in an hour. All these and many other schemes of prospective wealth were at his command, if only he could beguile a capitalist to his assistance.

Towards the close of the dinner Crawley Foyle became excited about the condition of the British aristocracy, denounced them one and all as "drones fattening on the earnings of the hardy sons of toil." "Not like my friend Peach," he qualified, "who associates himself with great enterprises for the welfare of his fellow men."

"Aristocracy !" exclaimed Captain Joybell, "what can aristocracy do for your great enterprise ? Sit on them. Crush them. The capitalist is my aristocracy ! Why, gentlemen, my friend Mr. Crawley Foyle is a prince — a prince, gentlemen."

And the gallant Captain gazed upon his glass of port with a proud and happy smile. The company was not in the humour to be critical, and from various motives was rather pleased than otherwise with the outburst of enthusiasm. It relieved the monotony and it was singular from the fact that it was almost sincere.

In due time the function came to an end, and the company dispersed with the feeling that another solemn duty had been discharged.

David Thresher took leave of Isabel in the library, where she had led him, and as they were parting she said :

“ Now tell me what has made you so dull this evening ? ”

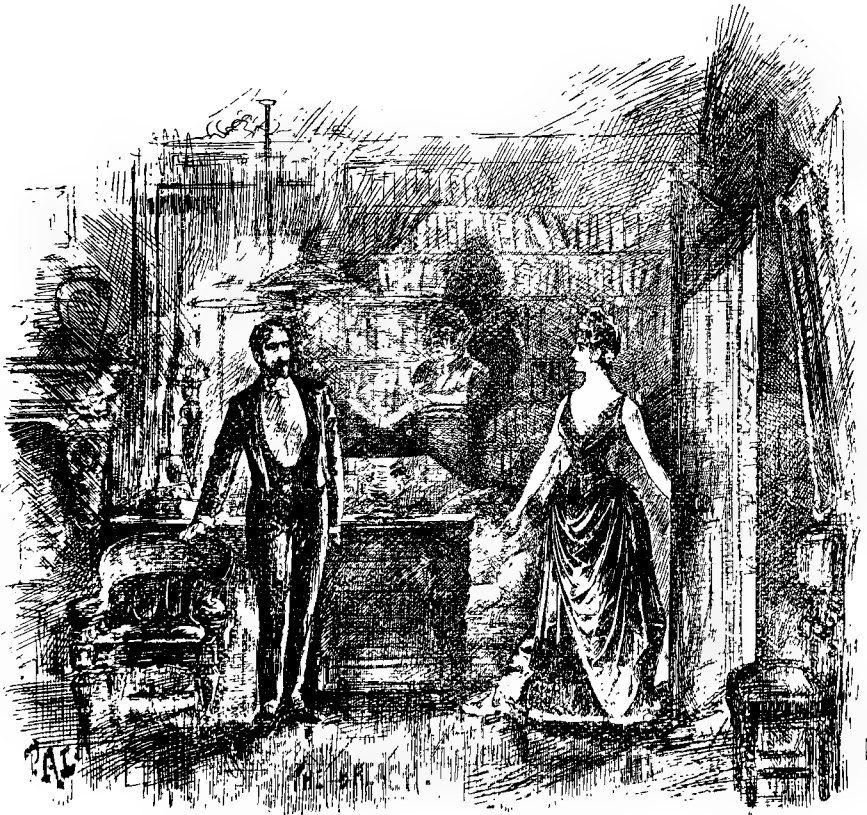
“ Nothing,” said he, with a nervous tremor of his upper lip that was common with him.

“ That is not true,” she said ; “ tell me.” And she looked up into his face with an intentness that made him shrink and turn aside as he said,

“ I cannot, because——”

And then he stopped.

“ What can there be so to affect you,” she asked stepping back a pace, “ that I should not know ? ” She stood with



her right foot in advance, almost, as it were, upon the defensive.

“That which is the secret of another, who——” and again he stopped, and looked upon the floor, for her eyes were intent upon him and began to flash with indignation rather than love.

There was a pause.

“You have said you love me,” she exclaimed, “and with passionate appeals have sought my love. I hoped to give it and would have married you; but what marriage can that be where confidence is denied? That which I may not know should not be part of you and your life.”

And she left him.



CHAPTER III.

JOSHUA COPE ON MARRIAGE.



JOSHUA COPE indulged himself in one luxury—tobacco. His cigars were the most fragrant and rare that money could produce. He imported them himself, selected the best, and sold what was left to a dealer. He took infinite pains with them in their storage, and made his daily choice with much deliberation; he refused

to smoke any cigars but his own, and while nothing put him in a worse humour than the smell of bad tobacco, he seemed to revel with a sort of fierce exultation in the fragrance of his own. He liked Foyle's smoking-room. It was not too large, the leather chairs were capacious and low; the room was effectually ventilated, and was not too far away from the other habitable parts of the house.

"Foyle, I've brought you a cigar," said he. "It's not my taste, but it will suit you exactly."

Then he proceeded to pierce the end with a bodkin without breaking the leaf, and handed it to his friend with something like satisfaction gleaming from his eye. Smoking seemed to have quite a humanising influence upon him.

They lighted up and settled themselves in their chairs.

"Give me the facts," said Cope.

Foyle shook his head and pursed up his lips.

"It's a very painful business, my dear Cope, very painful—his relations to Isabel."

"Never mind about her, Foyle, let us get to business. What did Thresher say?"

"He said, my dear Cope, that we were carrying on a dishonest business, and he wished to retire from it."

"Nothing more?"

"Not a word."

"No threats?"

"None."

"Oh."

Cope ruminated; and after a time jerked out suddenly:

"What is his capital?"

"£52,000."

"Oh," said Cope, and then in a tone of guileless incapacity, he asked, "what is to be done?"

"That, my dear Cope, is for you to say."

"Dear Cope wants to know what you are going to do, Foyle."

"I do?" exclaimed the head and front of Schrieber & Co.; "I can do nothing—literally nothing. You know my political position and all the numerous obligations resting upon me. It is impossible—absolutely impossible for me to do a single thing."

Cope smoked vigorously, revolving his great cigar with his lips, as if he were winding himself up. Foyle waited with submissive silence: his loud-voiced domineering self-assertion was gone. He was passing through a crisis. David Thresher's fifty thousand had been an acceptable addition to the resources of the firm of Schrieber & Co. when he joined it, and the new partner had been placidly indifferent for a year or two as to the course of the business; but accident had brought to his knowledge one or two facts from which he drew conclusions detrimental to the honesty, the morality, and even the humanity of Schrieber & Co. David Thresher took the sober commonplace view that a ship's crew, on the open sea, with bad provisions, would be in a fair way of meeting death, and he did not look with equanimity on the fact that he might by a strict view of responsibility be regarded as in some sense their murderer. He accordingly expostulated, but without effect, and, therefore, resolved to withdraw.

Cope stopped smoking, laid his cigar down, and leaning forward said:

"Now tell me another thing. Have you any particular affection for Thresher?"

"Oh! dear no," exclaimed Foyle, "none at all."

"Oh," grunted Cope, and he commenced smoking again. Presently he said with great deliberation:

"It seems to me that the position stands in this way Master Thresher desires to get rid of us. Now I propose we should get rid of him. I don't care to have a mean self-sufficient morality-monger going about our place, looking here and there, and finding fault with our notions of the way of making profits. He must go, Foyle, before he makes mischief. We must get rid of him at once."

"Admirable," exclaimed Foyle.

"I mean altogether," said Cope, with a searching look, "root and branch."

Foyle thought of Isabel, and turned pale. Cope resumed :

"The first thing you have to do is to look the facts in the face. You never do, but if you don't begin soon, the facts will look you in the face and stare you out of countenance. Now look! If you made out a fair and square balance sheet of your affairs with the world, you will find you couldn't pay five shillings in the pound. You're a pauper Foyle. Do you see?"

Crawley Foyle shuddered.

"Now," said Cope, "that's a bad state to be in, and you've got to get out of it. And I'll tell yer how."

Foyle started. A faint ray of hope shot across his countenance.

"You have first," said Cope, with an emphasis almost amounting to violence, "to get rid of Thresher altogether. You are not going to let your daughter marry a man who accuses you of dishonesty?"

"Certainly not," said Foyle, reviving under the influence of outraged virtue.

"Thing's preposterous," responded Cope, who, after a pause, proceeded methodically: "Now, I have been looking at Miss Isabel to-night, and I have come to the conclusion that she's your trump card. You must sell her!"

Mr. Crawley Foyle bounded from his chair, his arms revolved like the sails of a windmill. He ejaculated: "Monstrous! Horrible! Heathenish!" and a variety of other melo-dramatic exclamations, during which Cope placidly smoked his cigar. The paroxysm having passed, Foyle stood glaring into space, very much out of breath, and very red in the face.

"I expected you would say that," said Cope, and after another gentle and reflective smoke, he continued his argument. Throwing his words at his partner with crushing emphasis, he said :

"I knew you'd say that ; but you're wrong. You are wrong because you will not look things in the face. Every match made in every house in this Square is a question of sale and purchase. Money or money's worth. Nothing else. They all shut their eyes to it ; but shutting your eyes don't alter the facts. You were selling your daughter to Thresher, and you were going to make a bad bargain, and I'll tell you the bargain you ought to make. You have got to get a hundred thousand pounds settled on her for her own absolute use, so that you may have someone to take care of you when you smash up."



Foyle winced.

"She should have," continued Cope, "the interest on the hundred thousand as long as her husband lives, and if she survives him she should have the capital. And if your son-in-law is worthy of your daughter he will put fifty thousand pounds into your business. If he's a mean-spirited, squeamish

milksoy, why, of course, he won't; but you have got to get the right sort. And that's what you must do."

Foyle was mollified; he was even impressed. He resumed his seat, and, after a pause, he asked with some hesitation:

"Don't you think it would be better for you to take up Thresher's share?"

To which Cope replied with exasperating decision:

"The man who marries your daughter will do that."

Foyle shuddered as he asked:

"And where is he?"

"If you can't find dozens of them the young men have very bad taste in these days," said Cope snappishly. "If you can't find a young one, try an old one: and if you can't find anyone else, I'll marry her myself."

What Crawley Foyle would have done at this point if he had not been previously fixed by Cope's eye it is impossible to say, but he became ghastly pale and seemed unable to utter a word. In the meantime Cope rose and placidly remarked:

"Now I come to think it over, I believe it will come to me. You see, Foyle, you've not got a penny, and your case is desperate. Desperate ills need desperate remedies. Just think it over. I'm going to bed."

With this homily Cope poured out a glass of rum and drank it off neat. He seldom took more than one glass at a time, but he always took one when he could get it good; and he was fond of announcing that when he was ninety he intended to take two.

When Cope had left the room, Crawley Foyle set to work instinctively to familiarise himself with the condition of things suggested to him by his partner. He was an adept at personal justification, and in less than half-an-hour he had persuaded himself that it was his duty to his wife and daughter to make any sacrifice of their peace of mind and comfort so as to maintain his position in the world—all, of course, for their benefit and advantage. This was Crawley Foyle's notion of self-denial, and it was a great consolation to him to feel that he had the courage to do his duty, no matter how disagreeable the process was to others.

It chanced then that when in the course of the next day Crawley Foyle discovered that a breach had occurred between

his daughter and David Thresher, he regarded the incident not only with equanimity, but as the ordinary development of the new order of events decreed by fate, and foreseen by Cope. It was only natural that he should nourish on the basis of this incident a profound admiration for his partner's prescience, in the contemplation of which he was relieved of all concern for the complementary infelicity arising out of the occurrence, and was disposed to encourage a feeling of gratitude for what had happened. This feeling was enhanced on learning that Isabel and her mother had resolved to go to Brighton.



CHAPTER IV

A THREAD OF LIFE.

"I THINK it will be nice at Brighton," said Mrs. Foyle, settling in the cushions as the train moved off. "It will be quiet." And the look of trouble that habitually contracted her face passed away and left her brow smooth.

"Yes," said Isabel, with a frown, "we shall be away from everybody—rid of the nuisances;" but her brow was not free from trouble. A look of dark resolution enshrouded it—a look such as hate could grow from.

Isabel had received her first check in life, and the trouble was all the greater since it was her first. All pleasure and pain, all joy and grief are comparative; and the first real trial of a strong nature, no matter how trivial comparatively, is terrible in its comprehensiveness. It convulses, distorts, uproots, and scatters; it defies reason, scouts advice, and absolutely prefers immolation. This shock of Isabel's was like the shock of death. The ideal of her secret musings had been shattered. Created out of the domestic error in the midst of which she lived, nurtured by a clear perception of the causes of her mother's unhappiness, and her father's gigantic failure in all that makes life worth having, and coming almost to fruition in the love offered to her by David Thresher, the blow was the more fearful. Its force may be measured by the fact that so far as Isabel was concerned, it destroyed all. She was not conscious of the possession of a single hope, so far as the world was concerned, left to her to cherish and anticipate. It had been made more clear to her beyond dispute that domestic happiness was impossible in the nature of things, that the dominating selfishness, the restless, but unfruitful effort, the persistent lie of her father's life, were but typical of the lives of the majority of men, as her mother's constant apprehension and abject submission were typical of the lives of the majority of women. The fact that in Society she found a calm surface in most households, rippled only by smiles and

perfect courtesy, was the confirmation of her theory, because she knew that nothing else was shown the world in their own household. She concluded that the cause was inherent in man, and she doubted her strength to withstand a force that seemed all-pervading and irresistible.

Had she loved it might have been otherwise ; but she had not. She had merely thought she loved. Companionship with David Thresher was pleasant, agreeable, enjoyable ; but it had not become a passion. Absence had not become painful, and, therefore, separation was not torture. Her love had not gone beyond the theoretical stage, and the wound she had received was a wound of the mind rather than of the heart. Still it was none the less terrible, for it had destroyed all there was to kill. Her imagination could conceive of no alternative to resistance, so far as resistance was possible, and endurance when resistance became fruitless. But she was conscious of enormous capacity for resistance, and its first form was a more passionate determination to procure ease for her mother.

It was only natural that she should have felt herself desperately ill-used by fate. She had not yet learnt that the sum of our pleasures is enormously greater than the sum of our pains even amongst the very miserable. She was about to learn that the epochs of our lives are in most cases marked by pain, not because pain is the more abundant, but because it is sudden. It is in the nature of pleasure to be slow of growth and smooth in endurance, while pain results from coming against the snags and tender hooks of life. Our pleasures are like the imperceptible blending of choice colours.

Crawley Foyle rented the lower portion of a large house at the corner of a street in the western part of Brighton, the property of Miss Winscomb, an elderly lady of small means and great expectations, who occupied the upper part. The arrangement had much to recommend it to both parties. It was economical to the one, profitable to the other, and convenient to both. Brighton to Mrs. Foyle was a refuge, and to Miss Winscomb her first floor was in the nature of a hermitage. Miss Winscomb reserved the upper floors to be out of the damp, and she had double windows to be free from draught, for she desired to inherit the accumulations of the great London Warehouse Tontine Association. Her sitting-room, long,

straight and formal, was full of old fashioned straight-backed furniture of the last century and on the walls were hung sundry black effigies which did duty for likenesses in the early part of this.

The old lady usually reclined on a couch placed before the window on her left hand and with a square table on her right. She was rather tall and must have been graceful in her youth. Her face still retained a winning smile and her manner was uniformly cheerful even to gaiety. Her dress was plain with the exception of a marvellously constructed cap, which rose above her forehead a good three inches, and enclosed two dark brown curls one on each side of her face. She also wore black lace mittens, and a white lace shawl pinned by a brooch containing a miniature. Altogether her appearance was striking and almost imposing. She was essentially a survival of the antique.

She was conducted to her couch from her adjoining bedroom by two attendants, Martha and Mary. Martha was about eighty, and quite ten years her senior. She had nursed her as a child, and lived with her ever since, until she had become a round-shouldered, cadaverous old woman, decorated with a brown hair front, which was held on by a narrow piece of ribbon velvet, and surmounted by an enormous white cap with frills. She wore, also, a little red shawl, and a print dress of sombre pattern and scanty skirts. She shook with a sort of palsy; but the sense of physical weakness, engendered by the constant jerking of her head, was wholly dissipated by a remarkably keen glance, and a very severe cast of countenance that indicated suspicion. Her companion, Mary, was her niece, and being not more than fifty-two, and only a score of years in Miss Winscomb's service, she was not felt to be altogether trustworthy. Her duties ended as soon as Miss Winscomb was safely placed on her couch, and Martha's special duty began.

"You're quite well this morning, miss, I hope?" said Martha, arranging a sofa blanket over Miss Winscomb's feet.

"Perfectly well, Martha, thank you."

Martha gave her a sharp look, as if she doubted her, then shambled across the room to a cupboard, from which she brought a smelling bottle, two pairs of spectacles, a handbell, a Bible, a Prayer Book, a watch in its stand, a Moore's Almanack, a peerage, and the last copy of *Bell's Weekly*

Messenger. Having placed these on the table on Miss Winscomb's right hand, Martha rested with her hands on the table, and made a searching examination of Miss Winscomb's countenance, shaking her head with all the more violence since she kept her eyes fixed upon her.

"Well, Martha?" said Miss Winscomb.

"You're nicely now, Miss?"

"Very much so, Martha, thank you."

"Well, I may go then?"

"Yes, thank you, Martha."

And Martha shambled away, having gone through the morning formula that had been the rule for at least twenty years, almost without variation. Service was life to Martha, and though there was not much of it left to her, imagination made a great deal of it and she conscientiously felt that but for her watchfulness Miss Winscomb would have been dead and buried years before.

There was a ring at the bell as she opened the door, an unusual occurrence that required special vigilance.

"A ring, Miss," she said, in her hollow voice, "I must see what it is."

"I see, Martha," said Miss Winscomb, who had a looking-glass which commanded the front door. "It's Mrs. Foyle and Isabel, I do declare. How delightful!"

"You won't see them, will you, Miss?"

"Yes, to be sure I will."

"You're sure you're quite strong enough?"

"Perfectly."

"I must tell Miss Isabel not to stay long."

"I'll see to that, Martha."

"It's morning now, and you must think of nine to-night," said Martha, leaning on a chair at Miss Winscomb's back as she spoke. She shook very much and looked terribly fierce; and when Miss Winscomb said: "Very well, Martha," she shook the more, and then shambled out of the room.

The lower floor was a marked contrast to Miss Winscomb's. The furniture was modern and luxurious. Easy chairs of every variety were placed about the drawing-room inviting repose. Seats for two were fitted to the windows, and low couches with yielding cushions were arranged in shady nooks

for rest or conference. The curtains, the decorations, and the ornaments were of the Oriental type ; the whole aspect of the place was restful, and, having regard to the exterior panorama, admirably adapted to dissipate sombre thoughts.

Within an hour of her arrival Mrs. Foyle was seated at the window watching the sea and the pier and the people who loved to dress five times a day and show themselves to one another, and she felt quite at rest. Isabel was writing a letter. She had come to the conclusion that the brief interview between her and David Thresher needed expanding into a plain declaration. A suspicion had arisen in her mind that her action had been a trifle hasty, and the bare possibility that she could have been wrong, or that she might be thought to be wrong, incited her to prove that she was incontestibly right. She had no thought of retracting—only of justification ; so she wrote to David Thresher expounding the position, setting forth the fact that she meant what she had said, and could accept from him nothing but absolute surrender. It was a cold letter, without a syllable suggestive of pleading. With passionate iteration she wrote :

“The man who marries me must be wholly mine. There must not be a single crook or crank in his mind or heart or soul, that he is not ready and anxious to lay before me. I care

not if it be crooked. I could forgive anything, even crime ; but I will not tolerate concealment. The hypocrisy of affection is the blackest curse that ever blighted human life.”

There was a light tap at the door as she wrote this, and Martha appeared.

“My dooty, miss,” she said, with her head waving about, “and mistress sends her compliments, and

would be glad to see you, if convenient, at any time.”

This was the official message, and it was followed by a personal rejoinder that mistress was not strong, that she took



a cup of tea at four o'clock, and that she hoped Miss Foyle would be good enough to remember not to tire her; all of which was delivered with great earnestness of purpose, and much physical contortion, holding on by the door.

The message gave a fresh turn to Isabel's thoughts. A chat with Miss Winscomb was always pleasant, and the mere prospect of it was cheering. She put the letter aside unfinished, and resolved to go at once.

"Ah! my dear," exclaimed Miss Winscomb. "It's a fine thing to be young and strong, and a very fine thing indeed to have the world before you, for it's a grand and beautiful world for those who know how to enjoy it."

All this was said in a high key, with a sort of frolicsome air that filled Martha with alarm, which faithfully reflected itself in her gruesome countenance as she left the room.

"It's delightful to hear you say that," said Isabel, with a smile, "because——"

"Because what?"

"Well, because you ought to know, having had experience, and because one doesn't always think so—at least, I don't."

"Ah! my dear, that's because you're too serious. Believe me, my dear, you should never be serious if you can help it. I never am, not even when I've got the rheumatism, and I'm seventy-two."

"Have you never been serious?"

"Never, my dear; but then you know I was a great flirt, and enjoyed myself amazingly. I was never hit but once, and that was with cousin Percy. A handsome man was cousin Percy. There's an ivory miniature of him on the wall."

The portrait represented a man of the old school—high collar, and black satin stock, but with a profusion of curly, brown hair.

"The very image of the Duke of York, my dear. He was hand and glove with the Duke. He lent the Duke money, you know, but I never heard that he got it back."

"Perhaps he never expected it."

"Very likely not, but," added the old lady with dignity, "we always considered it a great mark of the Duke's esteem of



cousin Percy, that he should put himself under an obligation to him."

There was a pause ; and then the old lady added with a sigh :

" Ah me, I should have married cousin Percy, but he broke his neck hunting."

" That was very sad," said Isabel.

" Yes, indeed, but it made all the rest more charming by contrast."

" Then tell me, Miss Winscomb, do you feel you are happier for not having married."

" That, my dear, is what I cannot tell, because I don't know. I have never been able to make up my mind ; and besides, I could never think of marrying anyone but cousin Percy. I never liked men, except to tease them and make fools of them, which I could do, you know my dear, very easily. I always thought men very foolish and very insincere."

" So do I, insincere," said Isabel, with stern decision.

Miss Winscomb lifted up her mittened hands, and exclaimed :

" Oh ! my dear, you're very serious—far too serious for happiness in any circumstances."

" Well, dear Miss Winscomb, I am serious because the world is not as bright to all of us—as it has been to you."

" It's as bright as you will let it be ; but if you scratch and bite it, it will scratch and bite back. I've smiled on it, and been pleasant with it, and it has smiled back to me."

" Then you must have had cheerful people about you."

" Oh, yes, always cheerful ; that's essential."

" But suppose you see wrong and injustice being done, would you not fight it ?"

" Dear me ! no, my dear : I should get away from it as soon as possible."

" But suppose the evil is among those of your own household—what then ?"

" That, I must admit, would be a serious difficulty ; but I should have ordered them to behave, and they would have obeyed me."

Miss Winscomb said this with an airy confidence and a coquettish shake of the head that inspired belief. Then she added :

" You, my dear, could do the same."

Isabel smiled incredulously, rose up and walked to and fro.

"We can do a great deal with those whom we choose to work upon," said she, "but we cannot change a person's nature. We can mould clay, but it must be clay, not granite rock."

"Ah," said Miss Winscomb whimsically, regarding the stately form, the noble head, and flashing eye of her visitor. "You don't know your strength my dear. If you only had the will you could melt 'em with your eyes alone, even if they were adamant. Yes, yes," she said, and nodded her head with perfect self composure.

There was, however, a difficulty in the way of Isabel's comprehending and reciprocating the old lady's view of her future. Isabel had a set of hard facts to deal with, and, whether she pleased or not, she was driven by her imperious nature to deal with them. She had come by a long process of introspection to feel angry with the circumstances in which she found herself; and although she possessed all the qualification for dangerous flirtation, she resisted the disposition, and seldom went beyond natural gaiety. Mere flirtation did not gratify her. The reduction of any number of admirers to a condition of hopeless slavery merely for amusement will not satisfy a reasonable ambition, which must have some definite and more enduring object in view. The old lady's panegyric was, therefore, acceptable to Isabel only in a modified degree. It pleased but did not satisfy her.

A sharp rap at the door was followed by the appearance of Martha, who gyrated to the chair behind Miss Winscomb, and, when firmly established, glared at Isabel, as she repeated the daily formula:

"Are you ready for your beef tea, ma'am? It's time you had it."

"In five minutes, Martha."

"I hope you're not tiring yourself," was the response, with another more fierce glare at Isabel.

"No, Martha."

"Think of nine o'clock," she added with determination, and shook herself out.

The spectacle was a strange one. For nearly seventy years had the elder woman fought against the ills of life that threatened the one precious thread of her peculiar care, and now she resented with bitterness any interposition that

she feared might prevent fruition. East winds and damp, dangerous excursions, and the terrors associated with the ball-



room, had all been in turn the occasion of solicitude. Though impaired and threatened the life still held on, and every hour was fought for and every enemy was fought against. To the extent that she had had a long interview, Isabel was an enemy, and Martha, in almost vindictive accents, said, when Isabel left :

“ I don't like her looks, Miss Foyle. She's flushed, and it's a bad sign. We shall have trouble.”



CHAPTER V

JOSHUA COPE AS PROVIDENCE.

MR. CRAWLEY FOYLE was in trouble. His partner had him in his grip ; and it was part of the nature of Cope never to let go. Cope used to tell him that he was a sort of Providence to him, kept him within bounds, showed him when he had gone far enough, now and then lifted him out of the quagmire in which his imprudence had landed him, and sometimes let him flounder out by himself into a state of moral rectitude. If he thought Providence was not smart enough in keeping his partner straight he was not above lending a hand, and occasionally he would scheme out a pitfall of his own, or add a little difficulty by way of finish to the trials that naturally developed from Crawley Foyle's imprudence. But whatever the preliminary stages of his partner's troubles the conclusion was always the same. Whenever Ruin stared Crawley Foyle in the face, Joshua Cope was always behind Ruin, grinning complacently with his hands in his pockets, quite able to relieve his partner, but not always willing to do so, except at a price.

These situations satisfied Cope's sense of humour. Schrieber and Company was no pleasure to him, unless Mr. Crawley Foyle, M.P., was heavily overdrawn on his partnership account, in terror for his seat in the House of Commons, and in mortal fear of the destruction of his social position and the dissipation of his social aspirations. Then he would grin and drink rum and smoke strong cigars all day long, and make horrible faces with his scar all red and blue—a sort of inexorable Providence, bent on stern justice and the reform of its victim.

Providence had been pressing hard on Mr. Crawley Foyle for about a week, and the effect on him was peculiar. He was louder in the voice, more thorough going in his denunciation of political opponents, reviled the Government, abused his own whips, knew the Country was going to the dogs, swore the cooks of the earth were in league to poison him, and generally behaved in an unreasonably boisterous and boastful manner. He had great schemes on foot for regenerating the

commercial decrepitude of the country, talked of millions with the familiarity of a man who had them, and in a way was excellent company for members, who were pledged to remain about the House for divisions and looked for diversion elsewhere than in the House itself.

But when Mr. Crawley Foyle found himself alone with Providence in his smoking room he became a miserable shiftless creature, scarcely knowing which way to look or where to put himself—a sort of shrivelled thing, for although he made a pretence every now and then of putting on his denunciatory tone he felt it was a useless performance, and he was within an ace of acknowledging to himself that he was an impostor. He did not actually do so, but took solace in the reflection that the British public was very idiotic not to see the millions as clearly as he did. Still Providence was not taken in, and merely grinned through the tobacco smoke, said nothing, and waited.

It was about a week after Cope had insisted upon David Thresher being paid out immediately that Mr. Foyle had a visit from a stranger, a pallid man with short red hair, a long black coat and a white necktie. It was Samuel Shorter, the confidential and familiar instrument of Cope, in the habiliments of a preacher, and he assured Mr. Foyle that he came to him as a Christian. He sought him at the House of Commons about five o'clock one afternoon and sent a note to him to bring him out. The note was a highly finished production. It was designed to excite the greatest possible concern in the mind of the recipient coupled with appreciation of the benevolence of the writer. It said:—

“Dear Sir,—I approach you from a sense of duty. Although not personally acquainted with you I have in the course of my ministrations become acquainted with facts of the most alarming character for your peace of mind, and your domestic reputation. I refer to an act of your son’s—no doubt concealed from you, but now unfortunately on the eve of being bruited on the house tops. I await you in the lobby, and am,

“ Believe me,

“ Your devoted friend in Christ,

“ SAMUEL SHORTER.”

As a politician, Crawley Foyle was a supporter of the great Mr. Hayter, leader of the Levellers, the idol of professional patriots, and the most popular prime minister the country had ever been blessed with. He had a majority of 150 over the Naturals in the House of Commons, and Foyle was one of his most advanced supporters.

Foyle was a pronounced Leveller. He had often declared that he would never rest until everybody had been levelled up to everybody else. He would suffer no exceptions, save only that he felt his genius and devotion to the country's weal made it reasonable and proper that he should be levelled up over everybody except Mr. Hayter. He drew the line at the Right Hon. George Eustace Hayter, because he did not see how the levelling process was to be carried on without his being at the head of everybody else. In fact it was generally admitted by the entire body of Levellers inside and outside the House of Commons that the Right Hon. George was head and shoulders above everybody else on the face of the Globe, and therefore it was ridiculous for anybody to think of being levelled up to him. Indeed as long as he kept on levelling up his friends and levelling down his opponents every patriot applauded, and only Naturals reviled.

Foyle was not only a supporter of Mr. Hayter, he made politics conserve his business interests ; and it chanced at the time he received Shorter's note he was engaged in assisting a project that was characterised by all the appearances of disinterested philanthropy, and at the same time remotely associated with the export of grey shirting. He was in fact waiting his turn in the House to bring on an amendment to Supply in the interest of the Emir of Kiboo whose domestic troubles seriously hampered Mr. Foyle's commerce.

All the journals interested in distressed nationalities expressed great concern next morning that he had not brought it on ; and one, which prided itself on being "advanced," announced that it "had reason to believe Mr. Crawley Foyle had been seduced by a malignant minister from the cause of freedom, and had yoked himself to the car of tyranny."

Shorter thought of demanding an apology when he saw the statement, and could with difficulty be persuaded that the reference was to the Secretary of State and not to him. His

grief at the situation was poignant when he reflected that if he could only make out a libel it would be worth £5,000 to him; but he had always been unfortunate, and this was only one more blow to a crushed worm.

Crawley Poyle burst out into the lobby like an avalanche,



nearly overturned a peer and three county members in conversation with a Parliamentary Agent, and stood out all fume

and fury with the letter in his hand, waiting to be approached by the writer.

Shorter advanced, hat in hand. He was much impressed with the company in which he found himself, but kept his mind fixed on the purpose of his visit.

"I trust, Sir," he said, "you will excuse my intrusion."

"Excuse you, my dear Sir? A thousand thanks! Come this way."

He led him in the direction of the library, then past the tea-room, down stairs to the basement, and out on to the terrace, a safe place to avoid intrusion at five in the afternoon.

"Now, Sir, what is it? Tell me all—everything. Keep nothing back."

Shorter seated himself beside the member, and clasping his hands upon his umbrella, he said :



"I was speaking with a friend of mine, Sir, who is under obligations to me, and he sometimes asks my advice."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, Sir, he is a bill discounter, and he has in his hands a bill of your firm's—Schrieber & Co., for £2,000, accepted by the hand of your son."

"Good God!" exclaimed Mr. Crawley Foyle, with every symptom of consternation, while Shorter regarded him

passively, still resting his hands on his umbrella, and noting in his cautious way the effect of his words.

"But that is not all," said he, warming to his work. "My friend is concerned for you, because he believes this is not a bill of your firm's at all, but a means your son has had recourse to to raise funds for private purposes."

"How does he dare surmise that?" asked Mr. Crawley. Foyle roused to indignation.

Shorter cringed, but recovering said: "Because on enquiry he finds it is not the custom of your firm to give bills." And then he added with a meaning look that should have alarmed the member to a sense of special danger: "He says it's embezzlement, not forgery."

"Ten thousand furies seize him," exclaimed the member. "Who is he?"

"Excuse me," said the messenger of peace, shrinking further away from his questioner, "I have all this in confidence, and unless you permit me to respect confidences I have nothing more to do or say. I can give no names, but the exact amount of the bill is two thousand, two hundred and seventy-five pounds ten."

"Oh," groaned the prop of ministers and the hope of the Emir of Kiboo, "the bitter dregs of the cup of misery are mine!" Then turning on the patient instrument beside him, he exclaimed: "It's a lie, a foul lie. You know it's a lie."

"No, no," gasped Shorter retreating. "The very simple truth; but I have no wish to say another word. I've been a messenger of ill, but my motive is good, believe me, Sir, I wish you no ill."

The member groaned again. "When's the bill due?"

"This day week."

"Oh Lord! You can get possession of this bill before it's presented?"

"Yes, sir; that is I can get my friend to bring it or send it to you."

"Then give me your address. I'll write to you. I'm not angry. I am moved, Sir, astounded, alarmed by what you say. I will enquire and write to you. Accept my thanks."

The member had recovered his external equanimity ; he saw his visitor out of the building and returned to the House to find it in Committee of Supply That he had been false to the Emir of Kiboo was only one more burden upon his miserable soul, and he left the House in a state of violent emotion, without having once imagined that the hand of Providence was in this grinding turn of the screw.



CHAPTER VI.

CRAWLEY FOYLE AS A POLITICIAN AND A FATHER.

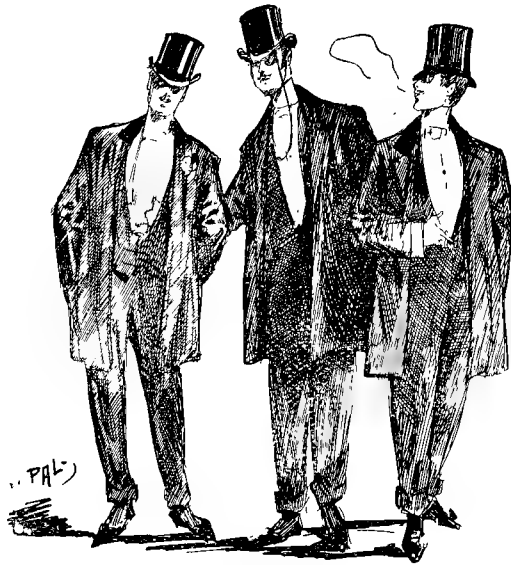


ARTHUR FOYLE was the natural result of his parentage and the circumstances of his childhood. Selfish without ambition, handsome without character, vain without self-respect, he went his reckless way, the idol of his mother, the enemy of his father, and the scorn of his sister. He was capable of anything, however despicable, to secure the gratification of a whim. He felt it was a part of the economy of nature that he should have what he wanted. His mother had as good as taught him to think so by the satisfaction of every wish of his childhood, and his sole conception of his father was that of a being to be avoided. He was younger than Isabel, and being naturally cruel and vindictive, he excited her aversion by tormenting her, and destroyed her sympathy by the exactions he made upon their mother's patience. Before he was twenty, he set up an establishment of his own, in a street off Piccadilly, and as soon as he was taken into partnership by Schrieber & Co., he seldom visited his mother, and never even her unless he wanted money.

Still, women thought him handsome and men also, when the devil hid behind his bright blue eyes and careless laugh, and this was when he had what he wanted and all things went to his liking. He was a splendid fellow when his bookmaker had the worst of it and his purse was full, when brandy and soda and cigarettes followed each other in harmonious succession, and none of the parasites who battered on him smiled on other lords. But when things were otherwise, his mouth went down at the corners and a film came over his eyes. Every line in his face was set in callous cruelty, and at such times murder would have been an act of kind with him.

It was this ill-conditioned result of weakness, neglect and ambition that Crawley Foyle was bent on saving, not that he loved his son, but because he loved himself. It would never do for Schrieber & Co. in its corporate capacity to know about the accommodation bill, which ought never to have been drawn. Things must be put straight, and there was no time to lose.

Most indignant parents would have gone to the originators of the crucial trouble, but Mr. Foyle knew better. His talented son was enjoying an excellent dinner in company with two elegant examples of modern youth at the Hotel Bristol. They were all made up after the same pattern, with



their hair cut very short and parted in the middle, with small moustaches very much waxed, an inch and a half of whisker, and amazingly high collars, that forbade stooping or laughter. They were exquisites of the most approved type, wonderful to behold and thoroughly well satisfied with themselves. They contemplated engaging in that miserable travesty of pleasure, a visit to the Carara—a popular music hall—and thereafter taking supper at 11.30 with a trio of the ballet. Mr. Foyle, senior, knew there was nothing to be done with a son whose soul's ambition was satisfied only with Burlesque, and to whom the grimy precincts of a stage-door were the very vestibule of Heaven.

Mr. Crawley Foyle, M.P., came to a desperate resolution. He left the Right Hon. Mr. Hayter and the Emir of Kiboo both in the lurch, broke through the guard of whips in the lobby, and set out for the first convenient train to Brighton. He went *viâ* the Reform Club, where he fortified himself with a thick point steak, underdone, a mealy potato, and a pint of old port. This was Mr. Foyle's invariable recipe for strengthening his physical powers when about to wrestle with an antagonist or revive an exhausted frame. It meant strength and vitality to him; yet it was simple and easily digested. Mr. Foyle went about the steak methodically. The undertaking he was upon was serious, and he felt the commanding necessity of unusual strength. He was less an impostor to himself on occasions of this sort than at any other time. Indeed, in proportion to the magnitude of his undertaking, he became honest in his musings; but it was then also his cunning predominated, and thus he became a more dangerous impostor to others.

He gave precise instructions about that steak, had it brought up to him before being cooked, acknowledged it to be perfection, sent a supplementary message to the cook to grill it as for himself, for he knew his taste, and then retired into a corner to muse and scheme.

This did not surprise the club servants. An incident of the kind had occurred before, and the head waiter associated the peculiarity on this occasion with the lapsed motion about the Emir of Kiboo. When Mr. Foyle dined before the dinner hour off a rump steak, there was something in the wind. That was an accepted tradition of the Reform Club; and although eccentric, Mr. Foyle's demands were respected, and even commanded precedence.

Mr. Foyle ate the steak in solemn silence—not hurriedly, but with steady persistence, revelled in the mealy potatoes, a piece of stale bread with some black crisp crust on it, began on the port wine when half through, and finished solemnly with one full glass. No cheese, no dessert, no anything to disturb the invigorating force of this powerful tonic for a strong man.

He left the club with satisfied composure, took the hansom cab that always stands at the door of the Reform, and drove to

a telegraph office. The message was for his daughter, and ran :

“Meet me railway station nine o’clock. Do not tell anyone I am coming.”

Then he went to the train, had a carriage to himself, and turned the whole matter over in his mind as he went down, settled exactly what lies he would tell, and where the emotion should come in. By the time he arrived he had worked himself into a somewhat dishevelled condition, and was conscious that his eye was a little wild and the left-hand corner of his mouth a little bit constrained. Crawley Foyle was a master of facial expression, and seldom overdid it. He was, however, anxious on this occasion, for he had to perform before an unusually critical audience.

Isabel was standing on the platform as the train drew up. Her father saw her from behind the curtains, and he was slow to alight. When Isabel approached him as he stumbled heavily from the carriage she thought him aged and certainly much disturbed. In an anxious hollow voice he said :

“Thanks, Isabel, you haven’t told your mother?”

“No.”

“Where is she?”

“She was tired, and I persuaded her to go to bed an hour ago.”

“Ah,” said her father, with a heavy sigh, “then we can go home.”

She felt his arm tremble as they walked to the brougham outside ; and her sympathy rather than her apprehension was aroused.

They rode home in silence, broken only by an occasional sigh from the devoted husband. On reaching the house, Foyle exhibited still greater emotion, walked with trepidation to the drawing-room, and sank into a chair with every sign of exhaustion. A cynic might have remarked that the chair was comfortable, but Isabel was impressed only with his dejected appearance and hastened to sit beside him in the hope that he would speak.

He took her by the hand, and with a ghastly look he whispered hoarsely :

“Isabel, my dear, we are ruined—ruined past redemption.”

She understood now why her mother was not to know, and for the first time for years she felt gratified at an action of her father's. His forethought for her mother touched her, and she answered,

"Well, perhaps we can bear it. Why not?"

"Ah, why not?" exclaimed Foyle with a touch of melodrama, and roused from his prostration, he added, "because our ruin is associated with family disgrace. Your brother Arthur,—may not your brother, that pariah, outcast, villain, dog who calls me father, has done it."

"How?" she asked.

"Forgery, embezzlement, dissipation, infamy," he groaned in bitterness.

The room was not well lighted, but the single lamp shone full on Isabel's face and disclosed a menacing frown upon her brow. Observing the effect of his eloquence, her father exclaimed:

"Oh, I cannot bear it," and, sobbing, he went on, "all my hopes and ambitions shattered, all your future blighted, all your mother's tenderness requited by an act of infamy. And now we have nothing but a black and shameful future to look forward to."

He sank back in his chair, and groaned again and again; and with each groan he seemed to shrink within himself, all huddled up, and shapeless, with his hands over his face, the very picture of a broken-hearted man.

Still, it must be admitted that the chair was comfortable. There was not a hard knob about it. It was upholstered in every part,—a perfect miracle of soft places and nestling springs. And Mr. Crawley Foyle had long before discovered that although the hands might cover the face, much could be seen by a sharp eye through the chinks between the fingers, and no one ought the wiser save the owner of the shielded face.

Isabel rose and paced the room with a firm step and growing resolution in her manner. Presently she asked:

"What is it he has done? Tell me plainly."

"He has raised large sums," said Foyle feebly, "on the name of the firm, and spent the money in dissipation. In a few days my dear friend Cope—the best friend I have in the world—will discover it, and then all will be lost to us."

"What will Mr. Cope do?" asked Isabel.

"What can he do? I owe him large sums already. He cannot go on with people who rob him."

Mr. Crawley Foyle's voice quivered with emotion, as he continued :

"Beside, I should not have the spirit to face him. Think of the dishonour. Happily, I shall be able to tell him myself. He will not hear of Arthur's crime first from another."

These sublime sentiments were uttered in low tones, exhibiting intense feeling, and every syllable sank into Isabel's heart. A noble ambition was aroused within her, but the inspiration was barren, for as yet no path was open to her. Still, she felt more and more grateful that her mother was as yet spared the trial that appeared to be in store for them, and she pursued her inquiries in hopes of at least prevention from exposure.

"Do you not think," said she, "that Mr. Cope, who has been your friend hitherto, will still be so, and assist you in the circumstances?"

"How can I suffer it? Oh God! how can the thought be harboured?" This was apostrophised as if in meditation; and then followed :

"My dear, you do not understand. It needs five and fifty thousand pounds this day week to enable me to meet my friend Cope on fair terms. The money he has got and to spare. He has perhaps ten times that and more—much more and if it were for another purpose he would give it to me freely, for he is generous, my dear—very generous, is Cope—but you see the money is needed to cover a fraud, a fraud committed upon him by one who has reviled and insulted him. Besides, it is impossible to go to him for another reason. Oh my God!" exclaimed the victim of a son's unfaithfulness, "it'll kill me!"

"Tell me that other reason," demanded Isabel.

He looked at her; his hair dishevelled, his face blanched, his mouth half open and horror depicted in every lineament. He slowly shook his head and buried his face in his hands.

"Tell me," she demanded, "something must be done; and I must know all or I cannot help you. You must need my help or you would not have come."

"No, no, I did not—I came because I saw no help—none anywhere," he gasped.

He began to be alarmed. The situation had become acute and his excitement almost genuine.

"What is this other reason?" she asked again.

"I refrain from telling you, my dear," he answered, "only because I fear you would sacrifice yourself for us. It is better the temptation should be removed."

A smile broke over Isabel's face, she thought for the moment that the allusion was to David Thresher. She fancied that his secret concern on the night of the dinner party had arisen from



The Temptation

this unfortunate incident. She imagined she saw the removal of her own despondency and the suppression of her brother's crime by the same means. She almost laughed as she said:

"Tell me, father, and let us see what the temptation is like."

He shook his head, and then, looking her full in the face, he said, with an effort and with measured tones:

"Cope has sought you in marriage, and I have repulsed him—now do you understand?"

Isabel did indeed understand ; and she was struck dumb.

“ Now am I right ? ” asked her father. “ Is it not impossible to approach him ? Could I think of purchasing a continuance of luxury and wealth and position in the political arena at the expense of your bright future ? No,” he continued, with melodrama in the ascendant : “ I’ll be no party to so terrible a sacrifice.” He rose as he went on, and began to pace the room. “ I’ll be no party to the blighting of a young life’s hope. If it were not for your mother,” he added, with emphasis, “ I’d let the scoundrel go, disown him and begin life afresh.” There was a fine dash of self-confidence in this declaration, but there he stopped, and with a long drawn sigh exclaimed :

“ Ah, your mother ! How I pity her ! ”

There was a pause, and then Isabel asked :

“ How old is Mr. Cope ? ”

“ Seventy-two ; it’s hideous.”

There was another pause, during which the Member for Buckton was positively anxious. He wished he hadn’t said it was “ hideous.”

“ Do you think I could do any good by seeing him ? ”

“ Not, unless—— ”

The door opened and Mrs. Foyle appeared. She had risen to take some medicine, and hearing her husband’s voice, she had put on a wrapper, and come to greet him.

“ Ah, my dear,” said the politician : “ I wanted to get away from the House, and thought a night at Brighton would do me good.”

Next morning Isabel’s mind was made up. She went to London with her father, and told him to send Mr. Cope to her next day.

She said she had resolved to see whether something could not be done. What that something was, she steadfastly refused to say.

CHAPTER VII.

A CURIOUS ANTE-NUPTIAL CONTRACT.

MR. WARE, of the firm of Ware and Frost, Solicitors, Old Jury, was an amiable old gentleman of short stature and few words. An honourable member of his profession, whose whole career had been devoted to keeping people out of the Law Courts, he was pre-eminently a man for giving good advice ; and, strange to say, most people took his advice when it was given.

Mr. Ware was never in a hurry, and usually seemed absorbed in thought. He entered his office, a large, comfortable, well-carpeted room, on a certain Wednesday morning with his accustomed pre-occupied air, put his umbrella in the stand, hung up his hat, and wiped his downy pate with a large silk pocket-handkerchief with care and deliberation. This was the formula of his actions day by day, throughout the year, summer and winter alike. He then walked to his table, with measured tread, and sat himself down in his capacious easy chair to read his letters. One after the other they were read as he opened them. The envelopes, after examination, he put aside, and the letters themselves he placed one above the other as he read them. There were twenty of them, and the only sign given by Mr. Ware of their comparative interest was a wider opening of the eyes, as he read one or two that surprised him. Having read them all, he rose up, looked out of the window meditatively, and blew his nose. He then returned to his seat, went over the letters again, and divided them into two sets, one of seventeen and the other of three. He then summoned his clerk, gave him the seventeen with the simple direction :—

“Attend to these,” and then he added, “I am expecting Miss Foyle at eleven ; show her in.”

The clerk withdrew, and he took up one of the three reserved letters to read it a second time. It was as follows :—

“Dear Mr. Ware,

“You have met me on several occasions at my father’s house, and we have conversed on general subjects. I believe I can trust you as a friend, and rely on you as a lawyer ; and as

I need some assistance in rather peculiar circumstances, I intend to call upon you at eleven to-morrow morning. What I require to be done is quite unusual and you may be indisposed to do it ; but if you decline, I presume I am right in supposing that you will regard our interview as strictly confidential.

“ Yours sincerely, ISABEL FOYLE.”

Mr. Ware put the letter down, creased his forehead, pursed up his lips, and then opened his eyes very wide. He then walked slowly to the window, looked out and blew his nose. Mr. Ware was obviously in a state of mental congestion. What on earth could the daughter of his old friend, Crawley Foyle, want with him in the shape of confidential assistance? The mystery was to be solved at eleven ; and at two minutes before the hour, Isabel Foyle arrived in the Old Jewry with her maid Jacobs, whom she left in the cab, and at eleven she was shown



into Mr. Ware. He received her with just the glimmer of a smile.

"You received my letter," she asked, and Mr. Ware bowed as he placed a chair for her.

"You understand the last sentence," she asked, still standing.

"Perfectly," said Mr. Ware, "it is the common practice."

"Yes," said Isabel, "so I should imagine ; but I want you particularly to understand that you are to make no communication to my father of any kind without my express permission."

"Certainly," said Mr. Ware.

"Not even that I have been here."

"Quite so," said the lawyer, with a genuine smile, "You may rely on me."

"Now I will sit down, and tell you what I want."

She had been standing during this prelude and Mr. Ware had stood, too, listening attentively and admiring the handsome girl, who settled with such firmness and precision the articles of war. She was indeed brilliant this morning in the simplest costume conceivable. A plain black silk dress, and a black close-fitting jacket, with scarcely any trimming upon it, slate coloured gloves and a slate coloured hat, with one deep crimson rose in the front of it.

So they sat down, and the second part of the interview was opened by Isabel, with equal decision.

"It is necessary that I marry Mr. Cope," she said, "against my wish ; and I want you to draw up an agreement settling the conditions upon which I marry, and the rules that are to be observed by him towards me, after we are married ; and I desire you to prepare this agreement at once, that I may present it to Mr. Cope to-morrow for his signature."

Mr. Ware was somewhat startled. There was nothing singular in an ante-nuptial settlement, but the turn of one or two of the phrases used by his client and her decisive tone, led him to conclude that the real point of the matter had yet to come ; and he was right. After looking at his client fixedly for an instant, he took a step, which those who knew him well would regard as indicating his measure of the importance of the consultation. He removed his solitary eye-glass and assumed his gold spectacles. Having thus armed himself, he coughed slightly, and said :—

"Let us proceed step by step."

And he took a sheet of foolscap paper upon which he wrote:—

“Isabel Foyle, spinster, to marry Cope”—“Joshua, eh?” he asked.

“Yes.” And then added, “Against her wish.”

“That’s it, eh?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Then why do you marry against your will?”

“Not against my will, but against my wish. I do not wish it, but I am resolved to do it.”

“May I ask why?”

“Yes. It is necessary in the interest of my father.”

Mr. Ware gave a little grunt, and frowned at his finger nails. Then he said:

“Now the conditions; what are they?”

“First, that he pays my father £55,000.”

“Fifty-five thousand pounds,” said Mr. Ware, scoring it down.

“Secondly, that he settles in trust, for my absolute use, a sum in Consols—they are quite safe, you know, Mr. Ware, and easily managed—sufficient to yield me £5,000 a year, at the price to-day.”

Mr. Ware looked up, with an air of astonishment and admiration; then seemed to recall himself, and said, “Precisely,” and wrote it down.

“Thirdly,” proceeded his client—“and this is very important—while he may require me to live under the same roof with him, we are to have separate establishments, with separate servants at my option, or at his; and you must put, in the plainest language at your command, not permitting of the least equivocation, that he is not to enter the apartments reserved for me, on any pretext whatever, except at my express invitation.”

Mr. Ware again looked up. He began to feel surprised, and opened his eyes very wide.

“To make it fair,” said his client, “you may make that provision reciprocal.”

“Oh!” said Mr. Ware, and wrote it down, “anything further?”

“Yes. I am to bind myself to appear in public with him,

for not more than three hours once in each week at his request, in addition to attendance, with him, at Church, on Sunday, if desired."

"In public, three hours each week, other than Church Sunday," wrote Mr. Ware, who had ceased to be surprised, and having finished, he looked up enquiringly.

"Nothing more," said his client, looking down some brief memoranda, "except generally that I am to be mistress of my own actions, and am to visit and be visited at my own discretion."

Mr. Ware noted this general clause, and then put down his pen. He looked very grave, pushed his chair a little way back, and frowned at his finger nails. Isabel waited; she did not appear to be anxious, but she was very earnest and determined with her large eyes fixed steadfastly on the face of the little lawyer. Presently he looked up and said:

"Do you wish my opinion on this proposed agreement?"

"Yes, please."

"Then it is my duty to inform you, Miss Foyle, that it would not hold good."

"Why?"

"Because its conditions are repugnant to the purposes of marriage; because its conditions, if observed, would frustrate the object of marriage."

"But I want to frustrate it," said Isabel, with vehemence.

"Precisely, but assuming it signed, your husband could act, and I believe, would act, as if these domestic conditions were non-existent. Do you understand me?"

"Quite; but I am not afraid of being unable to enforce them. The question I want you to answer is: Can these conditions be put into legal shape?"

"Oh, yes; but what we have to consider is the question as to the utility of putting into legal shape conditions that are inconsistent with the law of the land."

"That gives me no concern," said Isabel, with much satisfaction. "I only want the document signed."

Mr. Ware became still more grave; he clasped the arms of his chair, and frowned at the notes he had made for a minute or two, and then said:

"There is something more I should say, and I presume you would like me to speak frankly and quite openly, as if you were my daughter, say. I have daughters—five of them," and Mr. Ware sighed.

"Do please speak quite plainly to me, and say all you can think of. I should like it so much better than any reserve."

Isabel spoke with much earnestness, but throughout she preserved a light and cheerful manner. She exhibited no trace of grief, or regret, or fear. She had made up her mind to act on a plan that she felt to be the best, and she was determined to carry it through. She negotiated with Mr. Ware as if she were representing a third person, so free was she from anything approaching to emotion. Mr. Ware remarked this, and could not reconcile it with the extraordinary proposals she made, and he felt greatly perplexed. Presently he turned his chair slightly round, and after a little cough said :

"Miss Foyle, let us begin at the beginning."

Isabel nodded a dainty little nod, as much as to say, "That's best," and Mr. Ware proceeded.

"You have no affection for Mr. Cope?"

"How can you ask, Mr. Ware? Have you seen him?"

"Yes," said the lawyer quietly, "but we must begin at the beginning."

"Oh! that reminds me. You begin your deeds with a 'Whereas' don't you? Then you must begin this with 'Whereas, Mr. Cope and I, having agreed to go through the ceremony of marriage, and whereas I have no sort of affection for my intended husband, and never expect to have anything but aversion to him, it is agreed,' you know, just as you have put down."

Mr. Ware's countenance assumed a still more perplexed air. He shook his head and sighed, and wondered how he could get all these preposterous proposals wrapped up in decent legal formula, so as to disguise their horrible import. He would have preferred to decline the work on the ground that a lawyer with a reputation could not consent to draw up an illegal deed; but while he feared that he might ultimately have so to determine, he resolved to try his utmost to serve his charming client. He accordingly proceeded :

"Well, now, let us consider," he said, "you observe that Mr. Cope is to agree to pay £55,000 and a sum to yield £5,000 a year. That will make a total of over £200,000."

Isabel nodded assent.

"But do you observe, my dear young friend, that you propose there a very brutal sale and barter of yourself in marriage for so much hard cash?"

"Yes, that is quite clear."

"And is it not a very unworthy and dishonouring transaction," added Mr. Ware, with warmth.

"Very much so."

"Then why describe it in such a bold manner?"

"Because I want its boldness and brutality to appear," she answered with rising passion. "Because I want it on record, signed by his own hand, that he entered into this arrangement with his eyes open, and that if he does not see it is dishonourable, that is his fault."

"But what of you? Will it not be dishonourable to you?"

"No," she answered. "He will know that I am consenting from a cause that is honourable to me, because it is self-sacrificing."

"Does he not know already?"

"No, he has not yet asked me, and when he does at eleven to-morrow, I shall give him this deed as my answer."

"Now, I have one more thing to say: you say you propose to do this injury to yourself in the interest of your father. I do not know the circumstances, but I must say to you, that the motive is insufficient. I can conceive of no circumstances that would justify such a sacrifice; and I am your father's solicitor."

Mr. Ware looked at his client, almost sternly, as he said this, but she answered with decision:

"I quite agree with you. The circumstances which make this step necessary, are not known to you, and cannot be made known. If you knew them you would agree that the motive was sufficient."

Mr. Ware listened with increased amazement, and gave up the riddle, but he added:

"I will not intrude my advice upon you, nor urge you to

disclose matters you prefer to keep to yourself; but I cannot resist repeating that, in my opinion, nothing can justify the sacrifice you propose."

"I am much obliged, Mr. Ware, for your kindness and consideration; but the sacrifice is not so very great. I feel that it means possibly ten years of my life; and that, Mr. Ware, I can afford to give."



CHAPTER VIII.

SOME REMARKABLY PLAIN SPEAKING.

SOME people pride themselves on always speaking their mind, which in practice means that they are proud of an inclination to make themselves very disagreeable. In the case of Joshua Cope the disposition had been steadily cultivated upon a foundation of financial prosperity, and resulted in an absolute disregard of everybody else's feelings. It is probable that a good deal of the courtesy one meets with in our everyday world is nothing more nor less than the language of conciliation. In some cases it may be regarded almost as the language of fear; and certainly very much of it would be changed to indifference or positive rudeness if subordination or expectation of advantage were exchanged for complete independence. This psychological truth was illustrated by the change which Cope achieved in his manner when he came into the presence of Isabel Foyle in the character of a suppliant. There was no brutality, no rudeness, not even brusqueness in his attitude. He was bent on achieving a purpose—the supplanting of David Thresher—old and ugly as he knew he was; he was bent on the complete eradication of Thresher from every spot that he had chosen as his own through which Joshua Cope had a path. His manner was therefore studiously conciliatory and almost polished. The plain speaking was all on the other side, and it was very plain.

Cope advanced towards Isabel with the air of a diplomatist as she stood in the drawing-room ready to receive him. His step was almost dignified, and his dress and manner, although not polished, were at least appropriate. With his hand placed within his waistcoat, not actually on his heart, but suggestively within the region of it, he bowed as he said:

“I have come, Miss Foyle, in obedience to an intimation from your father, who said you were willing to receive me.”

Isabel bowed stiffly as she stood with a letter in her hand. She had risen from her writing-table to receive him.

Mr. Cope continued :

“ Your father, Miss Foyle, gave me some hope that you were disposed to accede to my request.”

He looked at her with a keen firm look as he spoke, and then bowed again, still with his hand in his waistcoat.

“ What is that request ? ”

“ The honour of your hand.”

This time Isabel bowed, and then, as coldly as before, she answered :

“ Your words are well chosen, Mr. Cope. You ask for my hand—nothing more.”

She paused. Her face blanched, and it seemed doubtful whether she had not over-estimated her strength. Cope listened with a respectful attitude, but his eyes glistened with watchful excitement. He said nothing, and Isabel continued :

“ My father prepared me for this request, and he has made known to me circumstances that induce me to give you my hand, but I can give nothing more—nor even that, except upon conditions which you may decline to accept.”

Cope bowed, as he said :

“ I shall be pleased to consider those conditions.”

“ I do not wish you,” she continued, “ to be under any misapprehension as to my motives or the feelings that I have towards you. I do not want to disguise from you that if I accept your proposals it is from a desire to please and benefit my family, and in no sense to gratify you ; and that the feeling of ordinary respect for you as one of my father’s friends is the utmost that I can ever hope to entertain towards you. Any attempt on your part to pass beyond the ordinary courtesies of a public dining or drawing-room would be received by me with repugnance, and my respect for you would be destroyed. I am content to marry you in the eyes of the world ; but as between ourselves we must be mere acquaintances. If we are ever more than this—if we are ever friends—depends upon you.”

She had said this standing, and every word was uttered with surprising decision. The old man was quite unprepared for so deliberate a declaration ; and although it was an exact corollary to the proposition he had laid down to his friend Foyle concerning his daughter, he was fairly staggered by it. Isabel took a seat when she had finished, and invited Cope to

do the same. He did so, and then with his eyes fixed on the cornice, he said :

“I respect your candour, and if I were younger I should perhaps feel offended ; but on reflection I don’t think I could expect anything else.”

This is what he said, but as a matter of fact he was not at all prepared for the logical conclusion of his own theories. He had in his declaration to Foyle looked only at the man’s side of the question, and had forgotten the woman’s. With the quickness natural to him he pushed the matter through his mind, and concluded that Isabel’s position was reasonable in the circumstances, but he was very certain that time would alter those circumstances, and in any case he would be master of the position.

Isabel seemed relieved. She rose again and took from her writing-table a copy of the agreement she had entrusted Mr. Ware to draw up. Handing it to Cope, she said :



“When my father spoke to me on this matter, and I had made up my mind about it, I had the conditions I spoke of drawn up in a formal manner.”

She watched him intently as he read it, but observed only that his face grew harder as he passed from clause to clause. When he had finished he folded it up and handed it back, saying :

“These are your conditions?”

“Yes,” she answered, with just a shade of timidity. He was quick to take advantage of it, and said, with his eyes on the cornice, as before :

“It is not marriage.”

There was a pause, a long and awkward pause, equally embarrassing, but equally useful to both. The old man summed it up in a short compass. It was not marriage, but an arrangement—an arrangement that he was prepared to assent to if he could make no better terms, because it satisfied his malice by excluding Thresher, and he had no doubt whatever but that in course of time, and in rather a short than a long time, he would tear the document into shreds. The only thing that really troubled him was the fear that the conditions would become known.

Isabel's state of mind was more complicated. She dreaded each and all possible conclusions, and most of all the acceptance of her own scheme, merely because it was the most probable. She began to realise the difficulties of the future. To plot in the boudoir is a very different thing from the actual contest with the enemy, and her very soul shrank within her at those few words, “It is not marriage.” She was not facing a precipice, but stood upright on a pinnacle, and there was no refuge.

“It is not marriage,” repeated Cope with great deliberation, “and the world will find it out. Are you prepared to stand what they will say when they have found it out? They will say ‘Cope's an old fool, and she sold herself for so much money’ How will you like it?”

“I shall not like it,” replied Isabel, piqued, “but it is not a question of liking; it is a question of enduring.”

There was another pause, and then Isabel resumed :

“I do not know your motive, Mr. Cope. I should like to think it mere generosity, but that cannot be, or you would have given the impulse generous expression. What is your motive?”

The old man bowed very low as he said

“Can you ask me?”

“Mr. Cope,” she said sternly, “this is not an occasion for compliment. I have already made plain to you that I do not accede to your proposal with satisfaction. Personally I would sacrifice very, very much to avoid it; but for reasons sufficient to me I have determined otherwise.”

There was another pause, and then she added:

“On reflection I do not need to care what your motive is. What I have to do is to adhere strictly to my own line of conduct; and I have only to add that if your motive is evil, or if you have ulterior intentions that will conflict with my resolution, I cannot be held responsible for the disappointment in store for you.”

She said this with some asperity, but with unequivocal emphasis, and the tone rather than the language gave a new direction to Cope's thoughts. He had been inclined to regard Isabel's attitude as a foible; he was not prepared for stubborn determination that might break out into open resistance and even defiance. He could see now that if he hoped for complete conquest he must dissemble. To most men the prospect would not have been inviting, but Cope in a sense was a sportsman, and the prospective struggle had charms for him. He resolved to accept her terms; and he resolved also to enter upon a siege of conquest or rather of repression and subjugation at the earliest convenient opportunity. The time had arrived for a conclusion to be come to, and rising, he said:

“Miss Foyle, your manner of transacting business has surprised and pleased me. I am prepared to accept your conditions, and leave the future to disclose whatever it has in store for us.”

After making this oracular declaration, he proposed to sign the agreement at once, so that not even Mr. Ware and his clerks should know that it had been signed. A witness to the signature was found in Jacobs, and after she had withdrawn, Cope, with a touch of gallantry, handed his copy to Isabel, with the remark:

“I make you, Miss Foyle, the custodian of my copy; I intend to trust you.”

Going out to meet his future father-in-law, Joshua Cope felt

rather proud of this last stroke of policy. The document was perfectly useless to him; its very existence was rather shameful than otherwise, and possession of it would have embarrassed him. He wanted to forget it, and as he intended to treat it as a bit of folly, he thought he could not do better than show his contempt for it under the guise of courtesy. But he did not like the rejoinder. It was brief and was not altogether apposite as a rejoinder; but it showed that Isabel had thought out the whole question. She answered as she accepted the custody of the document:

“We will be married at the Registry Office. I decline to be married by a clergyman; I have been reading the marriage service.”



CHAPTER IX.

JOSHUA COPE'S PURCHASE.

THE success which had attended Crawley Foyle's finesse had a curious effect upon his mental condition. He was unusually excited. He talked incessantly when in company, and when alone he was continually on the move. Had he questioned himself he would have been obliged to confess that he had done a very mean thing; it was because he refused to admit this obvious and intrusive fact that he bristled with declarations of satisfaction at the turn things had taken.

It must be admitted that on the completion of the financial arrangements, which were all conducted under the superintendence of Mr. Ware, with many sighs and much doubting, Mr. Crawley Foyle found himself in a highly prosperous position. He had never indeed stood so well with the world, and he did not in the least exaggerate when he seized upon a chance opportunity to remark to Isabel, in tones of genuine emotion, that whatever resulted from the step she had taken he would never forget to his dying day that he and all of their household owed every moment of their future happiness to her self-sacrifice.

And how had this great change come about? A little heap of senseless gold had been marked with a new ticket and that gave "happiness." Two or three cross entries in a ledger, a transaction in figures with a banker, a signature or two, and smiling vivacity took the place of vacant consternation.

But the price paid for the check which Ruin had received had not yet been counted up. The heart that offered itself to be bruised and broken in order that the ledger entries might be made, had not as yet discovered itself. The bud of the rose that's pierced by the worm is not more unconscious of the glow of the summer sun than was this enshrouded heart that seemed likely to be born to the fulness of life and passion only to find itself imprisoned though unenslaved. Not one of all the parties to this purchase and sale of the dormant essence

of a woman's heart could value the tremendous possibilities in which they trafficked, or imagine a millionth fragment of the evil that they did. Nor could one say that any cared, save only Mr. Ware, and he was silent.

The financial arrangements were concluded in Mr. Ware's office. The necessary cheques were handed over, the trust deeds signed; and every anterior provision made to comply with the pre-arranged conditions. The trustees were Mr. Ware, himself, and Mr. Crawley Foyle, with power to appoint successors, and the whole business besides being restrained within the limits of the confidential circle occupied only ten minutes.

"That's what I call a smooth piece of work," said Cope. "It's all rounded up at the corners, all nice and clean, and nothing left over." His eyes twinkled as he buttoned up his pockets, one on each side, and he finished off his reflections by wiping the back of his hand across his mouth.

Mr. Ware did not like the action nor the remark, and he pursed up his lips, and lifted a pen nervously, only to replace it on the table. His natural sense condemned this smooth piece of work, but he made no comment.

Going home that day, and in the calm of the evening, surrounded by three of the five daughters, he thought to himself that he ought to have said something to make known his disapproval of the transaction, and phrase after phrase that he might have uttered passed through his mind, all more or less appropriate and telling. He turned them over and over, and regretted that he had not had the courage to defy professional etiquette and say them all one after the other in the wild enthusiasm of a just indignation.

"Ah," thought he, "the work was smooth, but let us wait till the friction comes." And if he had only said at the close of the day's sad business, "If my clients are satisfied, I can have no opinion upon the propriety of the agreements;" or "There is one party to the smooth piece of work whose real interest, whatever her generosity may have conceded, appears to have been very little considered."

But Mr. Ware had held his peace and fell asleep that night reflecting that even if he had said these, and other things a thousand times more bitter, he would not have

altered the fact, and he had now the consolation of knowing that he had not made matters worse, nor hampered his hope of usefulness to Isabel in the future by comment that might have been regarded as impertinent, and deserving the punishment of dismissal.

Cope's remark was by no means displeasing to Foyle, however. The bold conspirator is always a source of comfort to his conscience-stricken neighbour, and there was a large reserve of boldness about Cope and no conscience.

Part of the rounding up and smoothing off had been a letter to David Thresher from Mr. Ware, enclosing a cheque for his capital, and remarking that the grounds of his desiring to withdraw were such that, in the opinion of the other partners, it was undesirable the separation should be delayed, but it remained with Mr. Thresher to elect immediate retirement or another six months of "alleged moral contamination." The closing phrase was Foyle's, and he was proud of it. All the cheques and documents were left in the hands of Mr. Ware, to be exchanged after the visit to the Registrar's; and punctually to the time arranged for, a clerk announced :

"Mr. Cope's carriage."



Now it chanced that Mr. Cope had never had a carriage in all his life, and when the party went to the office door, and

beheld a positive equipage, consisting of a large but lightly constructed open carriage hung on C springs, drawn by a pair of colossal bays, with an immovable coachman on the box, and a statuesque footman at the door, they were amazed beyond the power of speech.

Isabel was seated in the carriage, and bowed somewhat coldly. The footman opened the door and the trio paused, but ultimately were placed by Isabel, who ordered her father to sit beside her and Cope opposite. She then requested Cope to give his orders to the footman, which he did mechanically, and, for the first time in the course of these proceedings, he found himself seriously doubting the wisdom of his actions. It was not merely that an equipage, which might fairly be described as perfect, had appeared as if by the waving of a magician's wand; but it presented to him the glimpse of a future that alarmed him. There was a boldness of conception, and a vigour of execution about the incident that took his breath away. What might she not do? He had no time to answer the question. The coachman was a finished whip; the horses moved in a style that made the pedestrians look round; the hansom cabmen smiled with delight as the carriage passed them, and Joshua Cope was at the Registry Office before he had made up his mind what kind of a comment he should make on the startling incident. But there was more in store for him. The brief and prosaic formalities of a legal marriage were soon completed, the party resumed their places in the carriage, and as the footman closed the door Mrs. Joshua Cope with perfect composure gave the order herself, and it was—

“Home!”

Mr. Crawley Foyle rather liked the idea of his daughter appearing in Eaton Square in her own carriage, and smiled. He had tried to converse as they drove to the Registrar's, but the effort had failed. Cope's frame of mind forbade it, and Mr. Ware was sad. Mr. Foyle might have had better success this time, but from the fact that he found the coachman took a wrong turn, and then it began to dawn upon him that “home” was not in Eaton Square, but somewhere else. It proved to be in Park Lane, and Mrs. Cope informed her husband that she had ordered luncheon.

For anything that the three gentlemen could see to the contrary when they arrived, the establishment might have been going on for a twelvemonth. Everything was provided, even down to the detail of a valet for Mr. Joshua Cope, who was taken in hand on the door-mat and conducted to his room in a manner that suffered no denial. This valet was the brother of Jacobs, Isabel's maid, and the pivot on which the whole order of the day turned. His orders were to "look after Mr. Cope," and do nothing else. His sister would look after Mrs. Cope, and the rest of the establishment was in the hands of Gunter.

The scheme was simple and effective. Isabel chose the house after an hour's interview with a house agent. She wanted a definite thing; a house with a couple of rooms on the



ground floor, opening into each other. All other considerations of size, number of rooms, the locality and price were matters of no concern. The two rooms and immediate occupation were the essentials, and these found, she put Jacobs and her brother in possession, and gave her orders to Gunter for a month's service, commencing with luncheon for four. Jacobs

ordered and Gunter provided. Crawley Foyle said everything was admirable, and he positively rejoiced. He actually succeeded in persuading himself that he had done a very good and generous, as well as a very clever thing, in bringing it all about. As for Cope he was perplexed. Even his ideas concerning himself were confused, and he gradually discovered that he was in thralldom.



The attentions of the valet distressed him; and Jacobs was such an eminently respectable personage that Joshua Cope, to his amazement, found he could not swear at him. This led him to reflect that there would have to be a change, but he was by no means clear as to the form the change would take or when it should be applied. In ordinary cases the time would arrive when it would be necessary to pay the bills, but he was in doubt whether he would have to pay them; and, as a matter of fact, he would not, for it was an essential part of Isabel's scheme that she would have the ordering of her own household wholly in her own hands, leaving her husband to order his where and how he pleased. By the judicious

application of conventional customs she had resolved to keep Cope to his bargain, and entrenched him within a cordon of domestic servants of irreproachable manners. Cope found himself in their toils before he had time to think even of a dwelling. He had in fact lost his chance.

It is a very good rule for settling the method of procedure in any new phase of one's life to begin as you mean to go on. There is no condition to which this rule should be more rigorously applied than the married state, and it chanced that Isabel, unconscious that she was regulating her actions by any defined rule, worked rigorously in accordance with it. She gained much by this—in fact, she gained everything she looked for, whereas Cope, who had resolved to act cautiously, and play what is allegorically known as “the waiting game,” which in many cases is no game at all, unless it be the game of losing one's opportunity, found himself in a diplomatic difficulty. If it had been a commercial transaction, no matter how large and intricate, he would have resolved it in five minutes, but he had taken a plunge out of his depth and wanted breathing time.

He was no nearer a solution of his doubt and difficulties after the luncheon than before, and whether the wine had mollified him or not it is impossible to say, but in the privacy of his apartments—those specially set apart for him—he took Mr. Foyle by the arm and said in a way that indicated a desire on his part to justify himself:

“Foyle, your daughter is a very remarkable woman—very remarkable. I wish I was five and thirty and—handsome.”



CHAPTER X.

THE JUNIOR PARTNER EXHIBITS TALENT.

THE office of Schrieber & Co. was next morning honoured by a visit from the Junior partner, Mr. Arthur Foyle. This was an event in itself, but what made it altogether extraordinary was the fact that he came early. He walked in with his hat on the back of his head, nodded in a friendly way to all and sundry, and beckoned Milton, the cashier and head bookkeeper, into what was known as the room of the Junior partners.

Milton found him straddling a chair with his gloves and stick in his hand, as if he had no intention of staying.



“Look here, Milton, old man,” said Arthur, “I dropped in to say that I have just lodged a couple of thousand at the Bank

to take up a bill that will be presented to-day, so if you hear anything of it you know it's all right."

Milton was a meek man whose life was circumscribed by the four corners of the Schrieber & Co. ledger, whose dissipation was limited to the less serious exercises connected with Salem Chapel, Kennington; and whose domestic circle consisted of a widowed sister and her daughter.

"Bill, Mr. Arthur? There is no bill that I know of."

"Exactly, old man. It's because you don't know of it that I tell you. It's nothing to do with you, but in case you hear of it I want you to know it's all right."

"Certainly, Mr. Arthur. Who accepted it?"

"I did."

"In your own name?"

"No, in the firm's name; but I tell you it's all right."

Mr. Arthur was very decisive this time, because the questions put by Milton suggested that it was not quite all right, and Milton ventured to remark in the mildest possible manner that it was a little irregular; to which Arthur in a light and airy way said:

"Oh, but I say, old fellow, look here, what more can a fellow do, but meet it. There's nothing irregular about that, you know?"

"Oh dear no, Mr. Arthur. It was only irregular to use the firm's name, that's all."

Mr. Arthur made an exclamation of pleasurable surprise. The transaction had never occurred to him in that light, and he responded jauntily:

"Oh, if that's all, old man, it doesn't matter a damn. And look here, as it's irregular, you know, you had better know nothing about it, don't you know; only, you know, I thought I'd better tell you I had squared it all right in case you heard it mentioned at the Bank."

With this he began strutting round the room flourishing his stick and vaguely ejaculating, "This is confidential, you know." "No necessity to tell the governor unless he asks you, you know." "Shan't do it again as you say it's irregular," and other comments of a similar character. Then bringing himself up with a knowing air he struck an attitude and said with superb self-confidence:

"I say, old man, I know a trick worth half-a-dozen of Schrieber & Co.'s. I've been making a corner and we've squeezed 'em awfully."

An expression of horror came over Milton's face as he said :

"You don't say, Mr. Arthur, you've been speculating?"

"Yes I have; and made a devilish good thing of it. My share was £75,000. What do you think of that, old man, for a three month's corner. Better than Schrieber & Co. Eh?"

Milton was appalled. The magnitude of the operation; its unequivocal success; the daring of Mr. Arthur and the coolness with which he disregarded all the ordinary obligations of partnership reduced the unhappy Milton to a condition of terror. But all he could say in response was to express a hope that Mr. Arthur would not in any case let his father know that he had informed him.

Self-preservation took precedence, even in Milton, of moral obligation. The duty that is imposed by honour and the generosity that shows itself in self-sacrifice are not much cultivated in the neighbourhood of Bankers' clearing-houses. In the atmosphere of Salem Chapel, Milton felt in a theoretical way that the world was ruled by love; but in the atmosphere of the Minories, and Schrieber & Co., he knew that the controlling principles of commerce were cash on settling day, and the Devil take the hindmost. He resolved to bury in the inmost recesses of his soul all knowledge of Mr. Arthur's bill and his "corner;" and such was the influence of the Minories on that timid soul that he announced with all the boldness of a practised liar that as it was "confidential as Mr. Arthur had said" he should be justified in taking his dying oath that he had never spoken to him a word on the subject; and would only know what came to him in the ordinary course of business.

This having been settled and Mr. Arthur having said a few kindly things in his cheerful easy way, Milton became cheerful too, and said with a sickly smile as if he were not quite sure he was not presuming :

"I suppose you were at the wedding, yesterday, Mr. Arthur?"

"Wedding? No. I was at no wedding, old man. What wedding?"

"What wedding, Mr. Arthur? Why your sister's, didn't you know?"

"No, by God—whom has she married?"

"Why, dear me, Mr. Cope," exclaimed the astonished Milton.

"Cope, be damned!" scoffed Mr. Arthur, with a loud discrediting laugh.

"Oh dear, yes," said Milton, "it's quite true, it's in *The Times*."

And away he went to fetch the authoritative announcement.



There is nothing so interesting as the virtuous indignation of a thoroughly dissolute man or woman; it seems as if

nature had specially fitted them for the artistic denunciation of impropriety: they know so much about it. The other more uniformly condemning class, who denounce what they have never had a chance of experiencing are wholly inartistic; they merely run amuck against what they do not understand, and are frequently actuated by jealousy of those whose physique has made them a prey to temptations the purist never meets with. Mr. Arthur was in a towering rage. He began to feel an heroic devotion to his sister, and strong sympathy with Thresher, whose superiority he had hitherto resented. For his father he felt unutterable things, and as the distinguished Member was at that moment entering the office with his head in the air Arthur dashed into his presence with a paper in his hand, and exclaimed: "You are at the bottom of this—you and old Cope have schemed this—a couple of infernal scoundrels," and he flung the paper on the desk.

The attack was startling in tone and in suddenness. Mr. Crawley Foyle was not prepared for it, and for the moment he was incapable of rejoinder. To be suddenly brought from the altitude of complacent self laudation and to be informed by one's own son that you are an exceptional scoundrel is distracting, and Mr. Crawley Foyle had to look about him for ideas. He found them in his pocket-book. The bill that he had purchased from that good man Samuel Shorter the evening before was at command; and as he searched in his pocket and brought it forth his passions awakened to a sense of the enormity of his son's behaviour, and he exclaimed, boiling with indignation,

"Scoundrels! Who talks of scoundrels? Look at this piece of paper, miserable youth; and thank a beneficent providence that your brother-in-law has saved you from a felon's dock."

The production of the bill was certainly effective, and for the moment checked the torrent of Arthur's indignation. But notwithstanding all he had heard from Milton he could not comprehend the reference to a felon's dock, and the fact that he did not understand made him look rather sheepish. His father mistook this for complete surrender, and followed up his advantage by a melodramatic oration, which he wound up with

a suggestion that his misguided son should go down on his knees and sue for mercy.

The absurdity of the proposition revived Arthur's spirits : and his desire to ascertain how his father had become possessed of his bill took exclusive possession of his mind. As soon as he found his father had taken it up he exhibited the wildest joy at being, as he said, "two thousand richer" than he had thought. Upon this Mr. Crawley Foyle harked back upon the "felon's dock" sentiment, and his son, who had a glimmering perception that a misappropriation of partnership funds, or of funds raised by an act of partnership was in the nature of embezzlement, drew upon his natural ability and made a thoroughly business-like answer :

"We'll settle one thing at a time. I don't know and don't care how you got hold of that bill ; but it has not yet been presented. When it is it will be paid. I have just lodged the money to pay it."

"*You lodge the money !*" exclaimed the father. "Why you haven't a penny in the world."

"Don't talk rubbish," rejoined Arthur, with an air of importance. "Present the bill and it will be paid, and fifty more like it if you have them. Send Milton round to the Bank now, unless you are going to make me a present of the money "

"I will," exclaimed the outraged parent ; and while Milton was gone the two walked up and down the room, blistered their tongues with expletives, and generally boiling over with extravagant vituperation. Some of it was unique for garishness, but exotic Billingsgate is not as picturesque as the natural growth, and to record it would be revolting.

Milton returned, put the money on the table, and got out of the room as fast as he could. His example seemed to inspire the junior partner with a new idea. Resolving to get possession of the bill at once, he left his father with the two thousand pounds before him a prey to strange misgivings, and some remorse. By no process of reasoning could Crawley Foyle construe the method or object of his son's proceedings, and as doubt was maddening, he called in Milton to his aid. That swerving moralist pretended to have ascertained at the bank

what Arthur had himself told him, and when confirmation of the position was secured, Mr. Crawley Foyle was bound to admit to himself that he had made a great mistake, and what was worse, was in danger of being found out.



CHAPTER XI.

DAVID THRESHER DISCOVERS HIS LOSS.

It was the lot of David Thresher to be an object of envy among men on account of attributes on which he seemed to set little store. It is a question not easily answered as to the regard a really handsome man has for his good appearance, and the price he would set upon it in comparison with other desirable things of this life. David Thresher was decidedly handsome. His full stature and auburn beard were typical of physical strength; the liquid depth of his large dark eyes gave evidence of a reserve of moral force, and these two qualities comprehend all that suggests a perfect man. Women regarded him with something like veneration, and many besides those who enjoyed his confidences looked wistfully towards him and dreamed of the wealth of trustful love and lingering rest in store for the woman who should win him.

He was wealthy, too, and could have devoted himself wholly to pleasure. The satisfaction of cravings that are common among men he could have easily secured, and perhaps it was because of this that his desires ran in other directions. It is the unattained that men really value, and the impossible is always, and in the nature of things, a priceless treasure.

David Thresher had a longing for serious occupation, and was curiously impressed with the grandeur of Commerce. He had studied the matter theoretically, and had invested it with imaginary charms. The lying and cheating, the sordid greed, the revolting oppression and the heartless ambitions engendered by the conflict of barter he had never met with except in the cupidity of the huckster, the pettiness of whose transactions caused him to disregard the principle involved. He had joined Schrieber & Co. for amusement rather than for profit; and though the largeness of the gains amazed and gratified him, the prospect of amusement was annihilated by the incidents of the trading. His imagination had failed to grasp the possibilities which actual experience unfolded to him. His illusions were dispelled.

Invariably reserved and a master of self-restraint, he long pondered on his position before taking action; and his relations with Isabel formed the chief stumbling-block in the way of a decision. He felt that a breach with the father would mean, perhaps, a breach with the daughter, or, at least, temporary constraint. He hesitated, but finally resolved that he would do nothing that could, in the eyes of Isabel, in any way reflect upon her father. This resolution, conceived in the most honourable spirit, resulted in serious misfortune. It deprived Isabel of the key to the position, and made her father's deception easy. It was impossible to say what view she would have taken of an open denunciation by David Thresher of her father as Schrieber & Co., but it is quite possible she would have declined to believe his malfeasance, notwithstanding her antipathy to him domestically. The die, however, was cast. David Thresher had acted honourably, and he suffered.

A copy of *The Times* had been delivered to him addressed in a wrapper and with the marriage marked. He was literally stunned. He had long loved Isabel with a deep and earnest love that seldom spoke, but had the strength and devotion which come of long contemplation and that exhibited itself in the thousand and one little actions that scarcely extended beyond ordinary courtesies, but which in his case were never omitted, and were always graced with glances of hope.

With his love, deep-seated, unmoved by sudden impulse, and guided by a strong determination, he accepted his dismissal at Isabel's hand as an incident that time alone could annul. He was slightly nettled at her want of confidence, and he was unready when confronted with a situation so wholly unexpected. Their relationship had not grown sufficiently intimate to justify elaborate remonstrance, and he felt that as soon as the commercial difficulty with the father had been settled, the time for explanation with the daughter would have arrived, and the course would be clear for love alone. A few days had passed, and with them his calculations had been belied, and his hopes absolutely annihilated. Not only so, but the misfortune in its personal aspect to him was dwarfed by the feeling of revulsion which Isabel's action had created. What despicable instincts had been lying hidden in her heart to rise to life and

hideous deformity at the fiat of a vile old man? Could any monster have created in the foulest depths of a distorted imagination so great a fall as this bartering of a virgin life for gold? He was stung to hopelessness, and the surging passion of his riven heart was stilled by a feeling of despair. In utter hopelessness he saw a future, dark and cheerless, unsummed by love, and incapable of awakening hope. The only passion left to stir him into active life was the feeling of revenge. But against whom?

Joseph Eales was announced. He came with Mr. Ware's letter in his hand,—the letter that enclosed the £52,000 which David Thresher had sent on to him, before he had seen *The Times*, for Eales was Thresher's lawyer and his college chum. The only question he wanted to settle was whether the acceptance of his money resulted in the closing of the connection; but interest in this point was now at an end. Thresher handed Eales *The Times*, and scarcely had he read it and exclaimed in amazement at the record when Arthur Foyle came in red-hot from the conflict with his father.

There naturally followed a piecing together of facts as soon as the storm of mild denunciation had been expended. Eales's professional disposition prompted him to suggest a calm consideration of the position; he asked innumerable questions, and, thus prompted, Arthur, after some hesitation, produced his recovered bill, and told the story of his morning's work in detail. Eales at once seized upon this, and connected the facts with the letter from Cope to Shorter that he had picked up on the railway line with such determined industry. He had not before declared this incident because his object in looking into Cope's proceedings had been something very different from that now in question, and he had never been able to understand the meaning of the letter or to connect it with the matter he was enquiring into. His pursuit of Cope at that time had originated in a departmental enquiry by the Admiralty as to the origin of certain foul and death-dealing stores purveyed to Her Majesty's ship *Nineveh* with lamentable consequences. The enquiry had failed and the incident of the letter had passed from Eales's mind. It now revived with luminous force, and when he had submitted the letter it became clear to his companions that Cope himself had got

possession of the bill and had been "the innocent holder" whom Crawley Foyle had paid.

These few facts opened up a wide field of speculation. David Thresher accordingly handed round cigarettes and the trio smoked.

It was a large and handsomely arranged apartment with painted walls and ceilings, carved oak furniture, and crowded with ornaments and curiosities gathered from all parts of the world. It was the room where he most liked to be, because it was a sort of record of his life. His dining-room was plain, and even bare, save in the furnishing of the table, which was adequate. The room was devoted to refecton, and was provided with all things necessary to that end, but with nothing more. His bed-room and dressing-room were furnished on the same principle of strict utility, but this sitting room was in the nature of a luxurious hall that had grown around the man, was part of him, and inimitable. Its great charm was its power to reflect a sentiment of repose: it seemed to clothe all who entered it with a feeling of rest and quiet. Its carpets were thick and soft; its hangings were abundant and warm; its seats were capacious and luxurious.

Eales and Arthur sat and smoked, Thresher walked the long room nervously, and let his cigarette go out. Presently he stopped and asked:

"Why is it that we bring all these facts together now for the first time?"

"Because," said Eales, "we could not before see their relation to each other nor our concern in them."

"Cope saw them," said Arthur.

"Because Cope devised them," added Eales.

"And we don't know everything yet, old man, you bet," said Arthur.

They were a gloomy trio; they were suffering from a sense of defeat, and no matter how violent and angry their denunciations, they were conscious of a feeling of humiliation.

"What's to be done?" asked Eales.

"What can be done?" replied Thresher. "What should be done? Can you conceive of anything fitting as an end to

such a catastrophe but annihilation? Cope must be a devil incarnate!"

"He must be all that, old man, to have got round Isabel. That's what beats me—why she caved in."

"Money," said Thresher scornfully.



"No," replied Arthur, shaking his head, "You had that, and she didn't care a bit for it. There's something else, and I shall go to see her to find out."

This was an excellent idea. Arthur was in the camp of the enemy, was in no wise troubled by any nice sense of honour, was thoroughly independent, and very angry. Said he:

"She knows a lot we don't. If she's gone away, I mean to follow. If old Cope gets in my way I shall go for him. I suppose I've a right to see my own sister."

This proposition was being discussed with approval and its soundness was generally conceded; but consideration of the way the intention was to be carried out was interrupted by the arrival of a clerk with a note for Eales which ran as follows:—

"A messenger has just called to say Mr. Louison has been

carried off in the night by three masked men, who made burglarious entry into Maida Lodge, and left Cheriton bound and gagged. Your immediate attention is desired."

"This is strange," said Eales to Thresher, "Your uncle kidnapped!"



CHAPTER XII.

THE FOUNDER'S HEIR.



MR. WALTER LOUISON'S circumstances strikingly illustrated the futility of human designs. His father, fifty years before, being much impressed with the assumed desire of heirs to see an end of their predecessors, conceived a scheme by which the pains of parentage should be relieved in this respect.

He had recourse to the well-known expedient of the Tontine, and thought that if it were made the interest of a man's children or successors that he should outlive his compeers, the desire for

his death in the hope of succession would be probably dissipated, or at least minimised.

He accordingly set about his scheme with great care, and being a man of active mind and no occupation, he was indefatigable in detailing the most minute conditions of the contract, which, from a purely commercial point of view, proved successful beyond the dreams of avarice.

Over two hundred lives were placed on the register originally, all over twenty-one years of age, and the subscriptions were all invested in the freeholds of London warehouses, a circumstance that gave a title to the Association. It was part of the scheme that none of the revenue should be touched except for the purposes of management, and these expenses were restricted by schedule to the most minute particular. All accumulations were re-invested in freehold

property within the area of the city of London proper, and balances remained in Consols until a satisfactory purchase could be made.

The growth of the new investments and the increased value of all of them by reason of the development of the City's commerce, had resulted in the accumulation of an enormous capital sum that the vulgar, by its disposition to exaggerate, had reported to amount to many millions sterling. As a matter of fact, the sum was under two millions, but few can really apprehend what this sum means as the possession of one man, which the Founder of the Tontine designed it to be. The power that it would give for good or evil was enormous, and had old Mr. Louison foreseen how near it was falling into hands that were distinctly evil, he would have been as eager to prevent as he was to promote the realisation of his ideal scheme.

But the ultimate destination of the money was nothing as compared with the influence it was hoped the conditions of its existence would have upon the minds of the heirs of the two hundred subscribers. The founder expected that the influence of greed instead of being directed to the destruction would tend to the prolongation of these two hundred lives. He sought to make an unworthy passion serve the purpose of virtue, to turn covetousness into love, cupidity into self-denying care. The futility of the scheme was written in glaring characters upon its first stages, and one tenth part of the labour involved in its construction would have achieved a thousand times better results if directed to the cultivation of the purest motives merely because they were pure.

Bent upon the promotion of mutual good-will the Founder had arranged that the subscribers should hold an annual meeting, and thereafter dine together. The meetings were called and the dinners were provided, but none attended. The



balance-sheet of the Trustees satisfied the subscribers on the first point, and, as regards the second, they were each and all afraid of being poisoned by the soup. The Founder had forgotten that while the immediate descendants of the subscribers had been provided with an excellent reason for keeping them alive, each subscriber was by the same process endowed with a special aversion to all the rest; and instead of their having one or two about them whose hope of profit by their death was tempered by the uncertainty of inheritance, each of the subscribers knew that there existed one hundred and ninety-nine others all eagerly watching for his death. Repress the fact as they might it was impossible to deny that the only point of real interest to the subscribers in the annual reports was the record of deaths. The accumulations soon represented a sum that outstripped imagination, so that the annual additions were of comparatively small significance, but each death was a step nearer possession, and the survivors read of them with ghoulish avidity.

And now there were only three—three stubborn and enduring lives, and the three watched each other from a distance with a life's expectation almost within their grasp. How could they fail to encourage hope of evil to their partners? How resist the unholy aspiration for their fellows' death? They called it "life," "survivorship," and their "good fortune." They refused to recognise the sinister corollaries and hoped on.

The evil influence of the marvellous arrangement upon which the elder Louison had expended so much skill had not developed in his son the grosser passions of covetousness, for it could not be said that he desired the death of his partners in hope of gain. The influence, however, had been scarcely less baneful. Mr. Walter Louison, whose disappearance had been announced to the desponding trio, was essentially a generous man. He was very wealthy, apart from the possible inheritance of the Tontine accumulations, nor was he anxious to incur the responsibility involved in the ownership of the enormous wealth of the Association. Still the desire for long life had developed in him to an extraordinary degree, and his fear of falling a victim to the cupidity of his partners had reduced him to the condition of a monomaniac. He would see no one, except his man-servant Cheriton; and the ingenuity his father

had shown in arranging the working details of the Tontine scheme, and which he had inherited, was used by him to devise the means of keeping everyone, especially his relations, at a distance. He had come to the conclusion that all care for him had its origin in selfish expectation, and he therefore cultivated a repugnance to communion with his friends and succeeded to perfection in realising, as far as life in London would permit, the conception of a hermit.

This disposition to seclusion increased with years, and became pronounced when he was about forty years of age. Even his solicitor, Mr. Eales, had never seen him; and the large transactions necessary to conduct his investments were all carried out by correspondence, arranged upon a plan which displayed ingenuity similar to that which had marked so much of the life and practice of the father and son. Each investment, each matter of business formed a separate set of papers that recorded the transactions in it from beginning to end. Whenever an incident occurred a record was made of it and added to the papers in question, and these were placed in a locked leathern case together with the papers on other subjects that had arisen during the week, and the whole were taken in their locked case to Maida Lodge and left there. Next day they were fetched away, and, appended to the new transactions, were the initials W L. In some cases remarks or directions were added in a clear methodical hand. Each set of papers was provided with an index, and in the case of an investment they commenced with a brief record of its nature, and its special points of interest.

Joseph Eales had inherited this system and also the client from his father; and in a strong room in his office, devoted to the affairs of the Louison family, there was a tin-box, that contained, among other family papers, Mr. Louison's will, sealed up and as secret as the grave, until that grave was opened for the remains of the testator.

The elder Eales had been much in the confidence of his client, and had said of him that he was a man of most generous impulses, yet always apparently fearful of allowing his schemes to come to fruition. His imagination always pictured danger ahead, and of late years he suspected everyone whom he met of being in league with the

survivors of the Tontine, and consequently his natural enemy

Mr. Louison lived at Maida Lodge, Mayfair, a large solid mansion at the corner of a street. It was surrounded by a massive stone wall, which enclosed exactly one acre of ground, and was as completely isolated as if it had been erected on a moor. Its exterior was sombre, but in no sense could the house be described as neglected. It was indeed well kept, with clean windows and bright brass door and bell handles. It had the appearance of an ordinary town house during the season, except that its front door seldom opened, and none but domestics were seen at its windows.

The domestics were three in number. Cheriton, a man of fifty, with his wife, who acted as housekeeper, and their daughter Mary, who was housemaid. A coachman and his wife continued to live over the stabling, and assist in the domestic work in default of other occupation, for the brougham was never used, and the horses had been long since sold. With the exception of Cheriton, none of these ever saw their master, but Cheriton was his constant attendant.

Prominent among the numerous body of relatives, friends, and acquaintances that professed anxiety for the welfare and long life of Walter Louison was Captain Joybell, whose devotion to wealth was illustrated by his adoration of Cope at the dinner table of the member for Buckton. Only the day before the disappearance of Mr. Louison, Captain Joybell rose early, and informed the partner of his joys—an elderly lady with weak eyes and a hopeless disposition—that he intended visiting their relative. The relative had been the Captain's guiding star throughout the whole of his later years, and had, indeed, attracted him to the charms of Mrs. Joybell, when a widow in comfortable circumstances, mourning the departure of Mr. Louison's younger brother.

It was on this alliance that Captain Joybell based his hopes of future luxury, but Mrs. Joybell, afflicted by a chronic influenza, and taking no interest in anything but frilled nightcaps and the curtains of her four-post bedstead, declined to hope any more. She based her conclusion on the fact that Mr. Louison had not been known to speak to anyone,

friend or foe, for twenty years, and the Captain was obliged to admit, in the course of family controversy, that he had only once seen his relative, and then he was received with a stony stare.

Still the Captain hoped, and he continued to devise innumerable projects for gaining access to one in whose future he took an absorbing interest, and whom he was anxious to inspire with reciprocal confidence. On this occasion he felt sure he should succeed; but Mrs. Joybell lay with her deaf ear uppermost, and said she didn't want to be bothered.

Captain Joybell's energy was marvellous; his hope unbounded, and he left his house, which was situated in the recesses of Kennington Oval, with a light and jaunty step, cutting the air with his cane, and ever and anon glancing with pride on his varnished boots and the smartness of his shepherd's plaid trousers. He would have had some difficulty in defining his relationship, but he was going to see his relative.

The door of Maida Lodge was opened by Mrs. Cheriton, quiet, clean, and subdued, with a cheerful countenance and hair just turned grey. She had seen Captain Joybell before and knew his mission. She showed him into a sitting-room, and said Cheriton would be with him immediately. Cheriton, however, did not come, and the Captain fretted. He came to the conclusion that he was not being treated respectfully by Cheriton, and he resented it. His resentment took the form of a sortie, for he became suddenly convinced that his relative was dying to see him, and was restrained by the evil influence of Cheriton.

The architecture of Maida Lodge was peculiar. The entrance hall was unusually large, paved with marble, and having marble columns on each side. Small rooms, with comparatively low ceilings, led off from the hall, and at its end was a broad staircase that divided right and left half way up, and led to the vestibule of the upper floor. This vestibule was in the centre of the building, a perfect square, and was lighted from the roof. Ponderous black mahogany furniture gave it a sombre appearance, and heavy curtains, concealing the mahogany doors of the rooms to which it led on three sides added mystery to the arrangement.

Captain Joybell issued from the sitting-room in which he had waited, crossed the hall, and ascended the grand staircase to the upper vestibule. He was astonished to see a little old man of singular appearance sitting in the middle of the apartment with his hat on the floor, and close beside it a leather case that he had evidently brought with him. His black frock coat was much too large for him, so were his Blucher boots, and his black trousers were much worn at the heels. His face was unwashed ; he had evidently not shaved for three days, and his lank black hair sprinkled with grey, seemed pasted round his face so as to hide the ghastly appearance of his left eye, which was sightless. He was evidently a nervous man, and from the noises he made he seemed to Captain Joybell to have a cold in his nose. The Captain was not pleased with the visitor, whom he regarded as a conspirator having designs upon his relative.

"Ah," said he to himself, "what a misfortune that my relative does not confide in me !"



His reflections were cut short by the appearance of Cheriton, a small man with a quick eye and a firm manner. Clean shaven on the face, bright grey eyes, a high colour and with the hair of his head cut short, he reminded one of a terrier.

He was ridiculously active for a servant, and dashed into the presence of Captain Joybell as if he were in pursuit of him.

"Good morning, Cheriton. How's your master?"

"Much as usual, Captain."

This was said in a sharp decided tone admitting of no controversy, and Cheriton stood between the Captain and the curtained doorway through which he had come—on guard.

"Is he there?" asked the Captain, pointing over Cheriton's shoulder with an insinuating gesture.

"Yes, Captain, I'll tell him you're here if you'll sit down," said Cheriton still on guard.

"Oh!" exclaimed the Captain, somewhat abashed. "You're a capital watch-dog—excellent. He's safe with you—quite safe." Then drawing closer to Cheriton, he pointed his thumb over his shoulder at the stranger and asked, "Who's he?"

"Slipper — Mr. Eales's clerk — come with the week's accounts."

"Oh!" jerked the Captain, as if this most reasonable answer had disconcerted him. Slipper was no longer a mystery, but the Captain's confidence was not restored. His relative was in danger, but the Captain was on the alert.

No sooner had Cheriton disappeared behind the curtained doorway than a brilliant idea occurred to the Captain. He would pursue him.

Withdrawing the curtain he opened the door stealthily and entered a large dining-room full of massive furniture, and with the walls covered with pictures, but no Cheriton. Directly opposite to him was a full-length portrait of Charles the First in a frame eight feet high. At the other end of the wall was a companion picture of Queen Henrietta, and between them a great canvas, 20 feet in length, representing the Arrest of the Seven Bishops. A most imposing wall covering—but where was Cheriton? He had vanished into space.

The Captain turned round with a sentiment of fear creeping over him. He still looked for Cheriton, although he felt he was not there. The remnants of breakfast for one were still on the table; and the sideboard had plate on it. But neither master nor man were in the room. A sombre ancestral portrait looked down austere from over the fire-

place: and on each side of it two large canvasses, companion pictures, one representing a shepherdess in ball costume, and the other one of those eccentric productions which, in addition to representing a legend, depicted the outline of no less than twenty human profiles in the rocks and trees, the clouds, and even in the garments of the figures. The Captain did not see all this. He paid no more attention to this extravagance in art than he did to the shepherdess. He was looking for Cheriton and Cheriton was nowhere. He walked to the window, which was at the other end of the room, and looked out into the back garden—a London shrubbery of the best possible intentions—but he saw no sign of Cheriton. His alarm increased, and as he turned he was seized with something approaching consternation at the sight of His Majesty King Charles the First advancing into the room, and immediately afterwards Cheriton stood before him.



The gleam in Cheriton's eye prepared the Captain for an attack.

"What do you do here, Sir?" asked the little butler, with his hair all on end, and anger in every line of his face.

"Nothing, Cheriton; positively nothing," urged the Captain, whose face had assumed an ashy paleness, while every vestige

of starch had disappeared from the fabric known as Captain Joybell.

"Excuse me, Captain," said Cheriton, with asperity, "That's nonsense, downright nonsense."

His Majesty Charles the First went back to the wall with a bang, and Cheriton pointed to the door. He did not show the Captain out as a consistent butler should, but directed him with fierce gesture to open the door himself, as he stood with his back to Charles the First, a guardian of all the mysterious possibilities on the other side of the picture.

It must be admitted that Captain Joybell had a very small opinion of himself as he left his relative's dining-room. He would not have hesitated to admit that he felt disconcerted, and a less interested person would have pronounced his appearance despicable. He did not even dare to look Slipper in the face as he passed him on the way to the staircase, but Slipper gave no sign of life beyond the ever-recurring snuffle, and the Captain was rather relieved than otherwise to stand once more on the door step beyond the reach of Cheriton's denunciation. But his appearance was characterised by a nervous and furtive manner arising out of an indefinite but still terrible anxiety associated with the temper of his relative and the view he would take of this intrusion.

The Captain's depression lasted five minutes — not more. Reflection made it clear that it would not do for him to return to Mrs. Joybell with a crestfallen appearance, and the immediate cause of his discomfiture having passed away, his courage began to revive. Its first expression took the form of a denunciation of pampered menials, with special reference to Cheriton: and in another five minutes he was moving along with the air of that figurative personage associated with the British Army, who is ready to go anywhere and do anything. Such is the effect of imagination working in conjunction with a sanguine temperament that by the time he had reached home his view of what had occurred, and of the future, had assumed a thoroughly rosy hue.

"My dear," said he, to Mrs. Joybell, "There's a good many years in our relative yet. He's a little eccentric, full of whims, but vigorous."

The Captain made this announcement with an air of great importance, standing with his legs rather far apart, and swinging his gold eye-glass. He had brought himself to believe implicitly in the accuracy of his statement ; and a very little more reflection would have enabled himself to assert that he had actually breakfasted with his relative.



CHAPTER XIII.

AN EXTRAORDINARY CASE OF ABDUCTION.



AS SOON as Joseph Eales had assured himself of the actual disappearance of his client, he went to Scotland Yard to procure the advice and assistance of the authorities. He was introduced to Mr. Slade, one of the most trusted members of the force, who came to him twirling a bit of string between his finger and thumb, and apparently indifferent to everything under the sun.

There are some so constituted that they believe nothing, and Mr. Slade was one of them. He owed his eminence at Scotland Yard to his chronic disbelief and his superb reticence. He was quite unlike anything that one associates with "The Detective." He was not lynx-eyed, nor clean-shaven, nor gimlet-faced. He was decidedly not polished, nor did he exhibit the slightest tendency to smartness. He was essentially deliberate and easy-going, with red hair and whiskers, rather stout, a pleasant countenance, and a mild eye. He would have passed for a commercial traveller, a meat salesman, or any kind of London shopkeeper. Thoroughly common-place, he was eminently calculated to put people at their ease, and the most experienced criminal would never have suspected Josiah Slade to be a detective.

Slade listened quietly to the smart young solicitor's story, twirled his piece of string, tied a knot in it, and untied it. When Eales had finished he looked up, and said, in a quiet unconcerned way :

"A queer go, eh?"

And he yawned and stretched himself.

There was a depth of meaning in Slade's remark. Such is the infirmity of the common mind, that the word "abduction" is associated almost exclusively with the disappearance of children of tender years, or marriageable young ladies, with

obstinate parents. It is seldom even that the mature spinster becomes the heroine of abduction, and Slade had never in all his experience heard that anyone had thought it worth his while to run away with a gentleman of three-score and ten. Why should they?

It was not often that Slade's scepticism carried him as far as this. He did not usually begin his investigations by declining to believe in the occurrence of the crime, the perpetrator of which he was asked, in the name of society, to pursue; but this was an unusual case, and he wanted it to be made quite clear before he stirred, that there was really something to stir about. Accordingly, he said, "Why should they?"

"For a good reason," responded Eales. "Mr. Louison is a member of the London Warehouse Tontine Association, and over a million of money will come to the survivor of three lives, of which he is one."

"And you think that one of the other two lives would not be dissatisfied if his life came to an end."

"Or their heirs," said Mr. Eales.

"Ay!" said Slade, blowing his nose, "and who are the survivors?"

"Miss Winscomb, who lives at Brighton, but never leaves her room, and Joshua Cope, a wiry old man, who lives principally in hotels; and who has many connections. He is Schrieber & Co. in the Minories; and carries on Manure Works in Liverpool, Newcastle and Glasgow; and is a nail-maker at Halesowen. He is here, there, and everywhere, drinks rum, and says he means to live for ever."

"Nice man, Cope," said Slade.

"He buys all the dead horses and diseased cattle he can get," continued Eales, "but there is no cat's-meat sold in the places where he carries on business. He makes manure where the cattle are slaughtered, and barrels of parboiled meat go to London, but the carriage costs more than cat's-meat sells at, and we know Schrieber & Co. purvey tinned meats to the Navy, and manufacture potted meats for breakfast."

"Anything more about Cope?" asked Slade.

"Nothing except that the businesses are all distinct and no connection can be clearly proved."

"You evidently don't like Cope, eh?" said Slade, with a broad grin. "What about the heirs?"

"Cope has none, that I know of; and Miss Winscomb has cousins, but she never sees them."

"We'd better go and look over the place," said Slade.

As they drove along, he heard more of Mr. Louison's eccentric ways, and his curious method of doing business, and when Eales admitted he had never seen him, Slade asked, as they drew up at Maida Lodge:

"Then how do you know that he has not been dead this five or ten years?"

This was a very disagreeable remark, and was made doubly irritating by the cool, matter-of-course way in which it was uttered. Eales was a lawyer, and recognised the force of it. He knew he hadn't a particle of evidence that his client existed, beyond Cheriton's statement, and he faltered, as he said:

"We have been in constant communication ever since my father died."

"By letter. Most people can write now-a-days."

Eales was dissatisfied with the representative of Scotland Yard, especially because he could not take exception to his argument, and also because Slade was quite satisfied with himself. He hummed tunes, fingered the piece of string, yawned, and generally behaved as if his mission were the least important thing in the universe. Eales was nettled, and asked, in continuation of the conversation:

"You don't mean to suggest that my client is a myth, eh?"

"So far as your own knowledge goes, he has no existence," was the answer.

This also was incontestable, and the lawyer felt the detective was teaching him his business.

"You may have your reasons," continued Slade, "for believing there is such a person as Mr. Louison, and his name may be in the London Directory, but you've never seen him."

"My father knew him," said Eales apologetically.

"Yes, twenty years ago. Suppose he had died. Anybody could have carried on the correspondence with you and pocketed his revenues. Why not? We must stand firm, Mr. Eales."

Slade had his hand on the bell as he said this, when Eales stayed him. It occurred to Eales that it would be well to conciliate the representative of Scotland Yard. Accordingly, he said :

“Let me tell you before you ring that you put the case properly from an outside point of view, and that, continuing in that line, you must prove Mr. Louison’s existence by the evidence of his man Cheriton, and so far as I know by Cheriton alone.”

Slade nodded, said “Good !” with an air of complete self-satisfaction, and rang the bell.

The door was opened by Mrs. Cheriton, and Eales introduced his companion by name only.

Slade walked into the house, humming a tune, and stared about him, as if he had come to town to see the sights, and was seeing them. It was part of his system to rub people the wrong way, and see what happened. He said that natural philosophy taught him that sparks resulted from friction, and sparks sometimes led people to discover fire. He was making sparks.

Mrs. Cheriton explained that her husband was a little upset, and was taking some strong broth she had made for him.

“All right, mother,” said the cheerful Slade. “Tell us what happened.”

Mrs. Cheriton told her story, standing in the hall, while Slade sat in a large arm-chair, twirling his piece of string and interjecting an occasional “Ay,” and “Oh,” and a “Just so.” The solicitor would have preferred an adjournment to a sitting-room, but Slade said he rather liked the chair he was sitting in, and Eales had seen enough of his companion to know it would be better to let him have his own way. Mrs. Cheriton accordingly, in a quiet, matter-of-fact way, that greatly pleased the detective, told how she had, that morning, found the front door open, and being alarmed by the circumstance had, on investigation, discovered that the stair-carpet was slightly disarranged, one of the hall chairs had been displaced, and a chair that was usually in her master’s library, had been brought down into the hall, and there it was before Mr. Slade’s eyes—a light rocking chair of singular con-

struction, an early example in conception of many modern productions.

These unusual incidents having excited Mrs. Cheriton's alarm, she closed the door and went upstairs. She found everything as usual so far as she could see: but she did not go further than the dining-room, where Captain Joybell's progress had been arrested the day before, because it was an established and unalterable rule of the house, that no one was to pass beyond that room except in the company of Cheriton, the sole attendant of Mr. Louison, whose pleasure it was to refuse visitors.

"Where was your husband?" asked Slade, suddenly.

"I'm coming to that," replied the housekeeper, who explained that Cheriton's non-appearance did not surprise her because he slept in Mr. Louison's wing and never appeared before eight o'clock.

"He sleeps in a room behind that door," said Mrs. Cheriton, pointing to the door on the right-hand of the entrance, going out, "and when I could find nothing upstairs, I came down and waited. I was a little nervous, Sir, and as I waited, sitting in the chair you have now, I heard a dull knocking, and after a bit, a crash of something heavy falling."

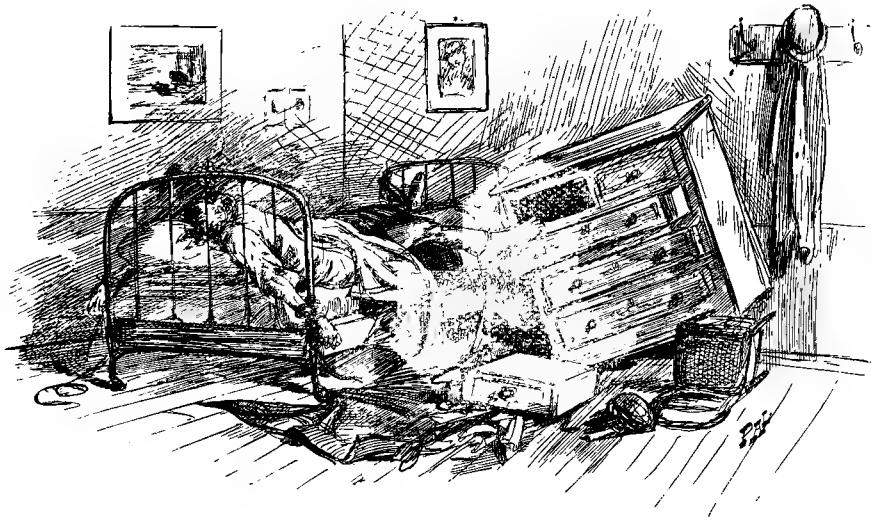
"Oh!" said Slade, beginning to feel interested.

Mrs. Cheriton said she thought the sound came from her husband's room, and she knocked at his door; getting no response she called "Cheriton" as loud as she dared and still getting no response, she knocked four times heavily, and after a pause, repeated the four knocks. After some time she heard what she described as four dull thuds, to which she replied by a rapid knocking, and when this was responded to by a somewhat poor imitation of her blows, she became seriously alarmed, and resolved to get to the other side of the door without delay. There were two ways of achieving this object, either to proceed by way of Mr. Louison's apartments or to break open the door which led to Cheriton's room.

Both of these ways, however, were forbidden by the rules of the house, and it became a question for Mrs. Cheriton's consideration as to whether the circumstances justified a

departure from established custom. She did not consider long, and being desirous of taking a noiseless course, made her way, with much trepidation, through Mr. Louison's apartments.

Mrs. Cheriton quite well knew the secret of the Vandyke doorway leading from the dining-room into the library. She opened it cautiously, and finding no one on the other side crossed the chamber diagonally, and opening a doorway descended a narrow staircase which led to a set of three rooms. In the middle one of these was Cheriton lying on his bed with scarcely any clothes on, gagged, and with his arms tied right and left to the head of the bed. His feet had also been tied to the foot of the bed, but he



had managed to get one of them free, and it was with this that he had been able to make himself heard. By a series of jerks, he had moved the iron bedstead in the direction of a small chest of drawers and with his foot he had managed to pull the drawers out. By rocking the chest backwards and forwards he had made the dull noise his wife had heard, and the louder noise was made by pulling a top drawer on to the floor.

Mrs. Cheriton soon liberated her husband from gag and bonds, asking numerous questions the while. Cheriton made

no answer to her enquiries, but immediately on getting command of speech, asked :

“Where’s the master?”

“And what did you answer?” asked Slade.

“I says I didn’t know, Sir, but that things wasn’t in their places; and with that me and Cheriton had a look round.”

“Let us have a look round,” said Slade, and they all went upstairs to follow the route taken by Mrs. Cheriton.

The Vandyke doorway was open; and the room beyond was a chamber of unusual interest. The walls were literally covered with books to a height of seven feet, and above that were a series of busts and portraits of the learned of all ages. Light came from a large painted window in the ceiling, through which, however, the sun never shone, because the window was covered outside by a small chamber glazed only at the sides.

Cheriton, who had followed the party into the library, pointed out that the doorway to the left led to his staircase, and that to the right to Mr. Louison’s bedroom, which they found was unoccupied. Questioned by Slade, he said he was awakened in the middle of the night by three men with masked faces, who gagged and bound him, and then went upstairs to Mr. Louison’s room. He said they were very quiet, but from the sounds he heard, he thought they were carrying the old gentleman off.

“What made you think that,” asked Slade.

“What makes anybody think of things that come?” answered Cheriton, with rising indignation. He resented the manner of the detective. “I only know what I saw and what I heard,” he added, “and I know no more about it, except what I’ve seen since.”

“And what have you seen since?” asked Slade, as he flicked a piece of dirt off his coat sleeve.

“Why,” said Cheriton, in a boiling fever, “the window they got in by”

“Oh!” said Slade, “let’s see it.” And they went down the narrow staircase leading from the library, and at the bottom they found themselves in a vestibule leading to Cheriton’s bedroom. Cheriton pointed out that a pane of glass in the window of this vestibule had been cut away; and looking out they saw

the glass lying on the ground with some pieces of calico about it. Slade viewed it with a grim smile, and looked at the mark of the diamond on the glass that remained, saw it was on the inside, and broke into a broad grin.

"Now show us your crib, Mr. Cheriton," exclaimed Slade, with exasperating indifference.

The party moved on into the little room, and Cheriton explained the way everything had happened so as to confirm in every particular his wife's description of what she had seen and heard.

"Now get on the bed, and show us how you did your gymnastics," said Slade.

Cheriton did so, and volunteered to have himself tied up, but this was not thought necessary, and they went outside to pick up the glass.



There were six pieces, and attached to one of them was a strip of calico, about a yard long; and one of the other five pieces had a piece of calico attached to it, wrapping over both sides. The calico had been fixed to the glass by spirit gum.

"Clever, anyhow," said Slade, as he put the pieces of glass into a pocket handkerchief. "Gravel doesn't take footprints, so we have nothing more to find here."

With this he walked indoors, and into the small reception-room, where he put the pieces of glass together. The long

strip of calico was fixed to a piece neither square nor circular, about four inches across, and the five other pieces fitted round it making nearly the whole pane. One of these five pieces with the calico wrapped on both sides, and with a strip hanging from it about two feet long, was evidently the second piece removed ; the others followed easily, and each had been removed by a separate diamond cut made on the inside of the window. Slade grinned again, looked hard at Cheriton, and said :

“ Lend me your diamond.”

“ Haven’t got one,” was the quick response, whereupon Slade shook his head, handed Cheriton a piece of glass, and asked him on which side the diamond had passed. Cheriton looked at it, and then answered :

“ Both sides : one curve inside, and the other curve outside.” And so it was.

“ Very clever, indeed,” said Slade ; “ clever anyhow.”

And then he explained to Mr. Eales that the first piece had been cut on the outside, and this having been removed, the succeeding pieces had been cut on the inside.

Then followed a private colloquy between the solicitor and the detective, in which the latter pointed out that granted collusion between Cheriton and his wife, nothing had occurred that could not have been encompassed by them, including even the death of Mr. Louison. The first cut on the glass had been made on the outside, but Cheriton could have gone outside to do it, just as a burglar could have put his hand through the first opening to make the subsequent cuts on the inside.

“ Then what is your opinion ? ” asked Mr. Eales.

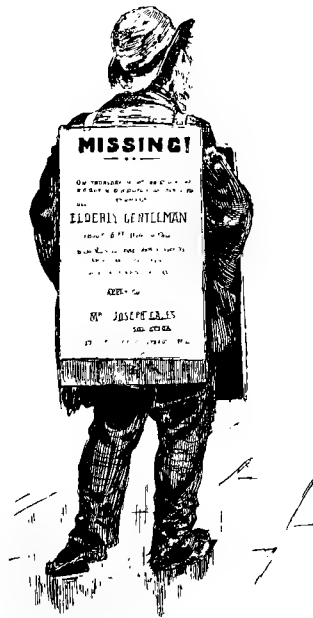
“ Haven’t got one,” said Slade, rubbing his face in a meditative way. “ People have been carried off before to-day, and detained in the hope of a reward. Cheriton could have carried off his master. His Tontine friends could have done so. Anybody could have done it. We’ll advertise for him.”

They accordingly commenced to draw up an advertisement, and having set down the first word, remembered that they didn’t know what Mr. Louison was like, for the very sufficient reason that they had never seen him.

Cheriton was called in, and by dint of much questioning it was elicited that Mr. Louison was five feet eleven, when he stood upright, was grey, but abundant in the matter of hair, usually of a forbidding countenance in the presence of others, and never spoke if he could possibly avoid it. His dress was plain black, with a frock coat, and a tall hat. A gold eye-glass was the only sign of jewellery about him, and a less definite description was never penned.

Slade looked upon the case as hopeless unless some accidental circumstance occurred to assist him. Cheriton quite agreed with him, and privately informed Mr. Fales, with an expression of profound contempt for Scotland Yard, that he should go on the quest himself.

"As for him, Sir," said he, "he don't believe no such gentleman as the master ever lived,"

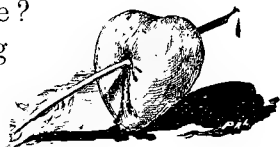


CHAPTER XIV

DAVID THRESHER REVIEWS THE SITUATION.

DAVID THRESHER could not be induced to interest himself in the disappearance of his uncle. A bitter sense of wrong saturated his mind, and his soul was in revolt. There had been some interviews with Arthur Foyle, some stern communings with himself, and some moments of unutterable rage. Then he took a pen and wrote. Without preface or subscription he flung his bitterness on the paper, and the name on the envelope alone indicated whom he addressed :—

“I would not write in the first bitterness of my soul, nor will I wait until I stand on the ashes of my love. I will not upbraid you for an act that most will say was dictated by caprice, nor will I charge you with contemptuous indifference to the sacredness of the engagement you have contracted. Anger, horror, revenge, have each in turn impelled me to vindictiveness and language of which I should have come to be ashamed. Amazement alone remains to possess my soul—amazement even to the feeling of alarm. I cannot reason upon your act because I do not understand it. Yesterday I said to myself, ‘She could not be worthy of a strong true love that would live through all enduring time, facing all dangers, and overcoming all difficulties, accepting pain and suffering, fighting to the last, because the love was true. Then why should I regret? Better that the harsh brutality of the open fact should be spread out before me while I am yet free.’ To-day I say, ‘I do not know.’ I say I do not know because I cannot think you incapable of heroism. To imagine one, whose being has been hallowed in the thought, could have been capable of a sordid passion is impossible, and my reason falters. What is it that has precipitated a step so strange, so unexpected, so absolutely foreign to a pure mind and a high purpose? I cannot tell. I do not charge you with breaking your pledge to me: you never actually pledged yourself to me. I cannot say you have been



false to your love. You never allowed that you really loved me. I admit I have no right to address you in terms of remonstrance or reproach: I cannot even claim a right to address you at all; but in the name of the God who made us, in the name of the love with which you have inspired me, in the name of our common humanity that ever looks for something higher and purer than the hand handles or the foot treads on: Why have you thrown my idol down; why have you broken the charm with which the deepest passion of my nature invested you as with a halo of light and purity; why have you taken a step that the world brands with sordid names; and how could you do a thing that links me with a sullied hope and you with a fallen nature? The world with its cold cynicism looks on and grins as it measures out the veil of conventional propriety covering the ghastly sight. I could have borne your rejection of me not being found worthy. I could have claimed honourable regard even though you had preferred another equal to yourself, as I imagined you; but to be rejected for such a one humbles me, benumbs me with consternation, shatters me to the foundations of my being!

“And now I must forget you—forget that you have ever been. To dismiss you from my thoughts as you are would be easy, except that your future must ever awaken my commiseration; but to forget an immaculate ideal, incarnate with the most perfect form of womanhood, is impossible; nor shall I ever strive to forget, nay I shall ever keep fresh and green the remembrance of a form whose presence awakened within me a reverent hope, an undying love, and the conception of a perfect mind. The hope may be blasted, the love dead, and the conception false, but they have become to me an aspiration, and I will cherish them as a reality that I have as yet missed but still look for.—Farewell.”

“And now,” said he as he folded up the letter and addressed it to Mrs. Cope, “Now my friend, Eales, I can think about my uncle.”

Eales was not present, but he was in Thresher's thoughts, for the disappearance of his uncle had much impressed him, and nothing but the absorbing character of his own misfortune would have prevented him from taking immediate action in that respect.

The letter, if it can be called so, seeing it was addressed to no one and had no superscription, was a necessary exhalation of the mind. The reduction of his thoughts to writing, enabled him to understand what he actually did think; and when he had finished he felt relief. Something had happened, a crisis had come; and the future would be coloured by the incident; but he had resolved to put the whole matter aside. His success in executing that resolution would depend upon events, but at the time he was perfectly sincere in regarding this chapter of his life as closed.

He was curious, however, as to the motive which had impelled Isabel, and to this extent his mind was open to fresh impressions and his heart to renewed pain. In view of the singular relations subsisting between him and those with whom he had been associated in business and social courtesy, he had resolved to send this note or memorandum by the hand of Arthur, between whom and Thresher a strange compact had been tacitly entered into, based on something stronger than reciprocal tastes—stronger even than love itself, for they had joined hands in the bond of a common antipathy.

Arthur was received by his sister in her own sitting-room before noon. It was a charming place, full of tasteful nick-nacks, and draped with fabrics of soft texture and pleasing colours. Low chairs responsive to an indolent habit, a large writing table suggestive of work, reading lamps, an easel holding a draped canvass, and books in abundance. This room had become a home, and its mistress matched its graceful repose. She wore a Japanese robe, loosely girdled, open at the neck, and the full sleeves disclosed a pair of oriental bracelets. Her hair was loosely knotted at the crown of her head, her neck was unadorned, and her brother was startled by the freshness of her beauty, no less than by her calm repose and self-possession.

She took him by the hand and said she was glad to see him. He responded with a look of admiration and pleasure. Then he said:

“Well, Iz, I’m glad to see you looking so well. I thought you’d have been miserable, don’t you know.”

“Why?” she asked, somewhat sternly. She remembered the cause of the step she had taken, and, although she had

resolved not to admit it to her brother, or refer to the incident her father had disclosed, she felt in a sense aggrieved at her brother's remark. She was indeed astonished at his coming. His tone and manner did not accord with the fitness of things, and she regarded him forbiddingly.

"Well, you know, Iz, I'm not going to believe, you know, you married Cope by choice, you know. There's something at the bottom of it Thresher and I don't know about, and I want you to tell me what it is, because we don't believe the governor has been square, don't you know."

Isabel was seated now, and at the end of this speech, which was delivered with some signs of embarrassment, she turned on her brother with a look so penetrating that he was startled, and began to wonder whether he had said anything amiss.

"Have you no suspicions?" she asked still more sternly, nothing doubting as yet.

"We have suspicions, you know; but we haven't anything we can be sure about, don't you know."

"But *you*?" she asked, "*You*? Have you nothing certain?"

"Why, of course not, else I shouldn't ask," he answered, recovering his self-possession.

"But come now, Arthur, has your father said nothing to you—nothing about a difficulty in which you were concerned?"

"No," said Arthur, "I've been concerned in no difficulty that has anything to do with you. Why, I never heard of the marriage until it was all over."

Isabel was perplexed; then after consideration she asked:

"But has there been no difficulty about money?"

"No, not a bit."

Isabel pondered. Obviously deception existed somewhere, but she was quite unable to determine where. She more than suspected her brother, and believed he was pretending ignorance. It was exactly what would happen in the circumstances described by her father. Seeing she hesitated, her brother broke out with

"Well, I don't understand the how and the why, nor what you mean by thinking me mixed up with the business, but all I can tell you is that the governor has been interfering in matters that don't concern him, and if you've been influenced

by anything connected with me, you've been let in, and it's a damned shame, so there."

Isabel shuddered. Fears of horrible import broke in upon her, and she dared not press her brother further. He was about to speak when she held up her hand to silence him, and said :

"Stay, let me think."



And she turned away from him with her brows knit, and a look of growing fear and pain upon her face.

During the pause Arthur was reminded of David Thresher's letter, which he drew from his pocket, saying :

"Here's a letter. I forgot. It's from Thresher, and I promised to give it to you."

She took the letter with a start, and blushed as she held it, deliberating for only an instant as to whether she should open it. The hesitation was natural, but the conclusion was inevitable. She opened it, and read two sentences as she sat : then dashed from the room bidding her brother wait.

It was well she was alone as she read those fearful words. Though every line was written, as it were, with the blood of a wounded heart, and the entire spirit of the appeal for light and guidance was the cry of a true but shattered love, yet to

her every syllable was a reproach—a burning, lacerating torture of the soul. That she had erred unconsciously did not avail her ; that she had erred honourably and generously was never thought of ; that she had been deceived, and by her father, was exasperating, maddening ; but even this was a trivial sentiment compared with the dazzling conception that the letter engendered of what she had lost. And to add to the terrors of the catastrophe she awakened out of the benumbing agony of her soul with the knowledge that she loved.

And now how was she to act ? Her resentment was deep, and would be lasting. That could remain in abeyance ; but her sympathy was imperious, and demanded expression. She wrote six words :

“ I have been deceived : pity me.”

CHAPTER XV

MRS. COPE'S "AT HOME."

LONDON SOCIETY was much exercised in the height of the season as to how Mrs. Cope had come to pass. It was true she had been taken up with vigour and determination by Lady Arabella, but then Lady Arabella was not averse to accepting responsibilities of this sort, and, although very careful, she had been known to make mistakes.

Lady Arabella was the daughter of an earl. She combined the possession of a small income with a passion for giving entertainments. The two conditions however were incompatible, and as she could not give entertainments herself to the full extent of her desires, she was eager to associate herself with the inexperienced and ambitious, provided they were also wealthy. Mrs. Cope was comparatively inexperienced, and, so far as Lady Arabella knew, she was ambitious. She was also wealthy, and therefore Society was not surprised.

How Lady Arabella came to know Mrs. Cope within a week of her marriage, and immediately thereafter jump into the capacity of a bosom friend and adviser, was one of those mysteries the courteous never inquire into, and the censorious dispose of with a sneer. Some said she was engaged through a Registry Office, and others that Gunter supplied her with the ice-creams and waiters. Whatever the process she was very useful, and piloted those she took in hand with energy and determination.

She was not handsome, but tall and angular, with dark hair and a harsh voice, well dressed, and forcible in her movements; but when all the arts had done their best she was a gaunt specimen of human nature, and an odd person to make a friend when grace and fashion were the matters in hand.

Lady Arabella made out the list of invitations, sent out the cards, and wrote an enormous number of letters to her dearest friends concerning the beauty, the accomplishments, and the wealth of dear Mrs. Cope. It was very amusing to society,

and as society lives to be amused, society took Lady Arabella at her word and made up its mind to respond. Isabel added less than a dozen names to the list, and one of them was that of David Thresher.



Lady Arabella engaged a new baritone, whom society had lately fallen in love with, and a French conjurer—a decided novelty, just imported, whom it was intended to turn on if things became dull. All the rest was left to Gunter and the Chapter of Accidents.

The Chapter of Accidents included the vagaries of Cope, and they were distinctly an unknown quantity. Cope by this time had become a slave to a reckless ambition. He found himself surrounded by circumstances not only un contemplated, but so

novel to him that he spent all his days and nights in mastering their characteristics. He made very little real progress, but his eagerness to triumph outstripped his prudence, and he resolved to act.

Distinctly in view of an ultimate purpose he had brought himself to endure Jacobs. It is true he hated him with a consuming animosity that occasionally found expression, as familiarity supervened, in bad language and bootjacks; but Jacobs was the only medium through which he could acquire knowledge of the working and intentions of the household of which he by the accident of natural evolution had become a part. He had at first thought of driving Jacobs out of the house, prompted by a feeling of resentment at the intrusion upon his habit of exclusiveness. This sentiment is not uncommon among men whose lives have been marked by strong individuality and self-dependence, but Cope overcame his repugnance to the demonstrative attentions of Jacobs, just as he resisted the temptation to resume his vagrant life. Joshua Cope had taken a step and he "meant to go through with it," moreover he "meant to win," and therefore he accepted the position assigned to him, and watched for his opportunity. He admitted to himself he had lost on the first deal, but the rubber was not played out. Joshua Cope had no intention of admitting to the household, and therefore to the world, that he had met with a check, so he had in an upholsterer and furnished a smoking room. He felt it would be a long heat, and he stripped for it.

Cope heard of Lady Arabella, and was concerned at her advent. Jacobs was a barrier, Jacobs's sister was a dead wall, but Lady Arabella was to his imagination in the nature of an impassable gulf. Close on the heels of this news came the fact that Mrs. Cope intended giving an "At Home" on Wednesday, the 17th, and Cope became a prey to thought. He bit his nails; he smoked costly cigars; he drank rum; his life had become a chronic nightmare.

Surrounded, hemmed in, literally dogged by an army of domestics, he was never free from intrusion, except when he was in bed and asleep, and now he was going to be subjected to troops of implacable demons, who, he felt sure, would come for no other purpose but to look at him and revile

him. Flight was his only course if he desired peace, but Joshua Cope's pride was strong. He smoked more cigars and drank more rum.



It was the morning of the 17th ; and Jacobs observed that his master's eye twinkled, that his manner was cheerful, and that he conversed freely on the weather, the state of the crops, and praised the polish of his boots. Jacobs thought he had become tamed, but Jacobs did not understand the idiosyncracies of wild beasts.

"I say, Jacobs, is Mrs. Cope about?"

"Yes, Sir, I believe so."

"Ah," said Cope, looking at himself in the glass, and thinking that he really had improved in appearance, "I want to see her. No, I don't. Second thoughts are always best, eh, Jacobs?"

Jacobs, who was the most solemn person that ever walked on two legs, whose face was an arid waste so far as expression went, whose garments were without creases, and whose lips were without colour, actually smiled, but with the smile of wonder.

"Jacobs," resumed Cope, "a message will do—a message after breakfast. I suppose she breakfasts in her own room, as usual, eh?"

"Yes, Sir, I suppose so."

The house of a week or two had become a creature of habit.

The message was a simple one: "Give my compliments to Mrs. Cope, and say I shall return at three o'clock to drive with her, and that two gentlemen dine with us at a quarter to eight."

"Yes, Sir," said Jacobs, and the disturbing character of the message was shown only by a very slight nervous twitch on his left cheek.

"Repeat the message," said Cope savagely. He had observed the nervous twitch, and resented it.

Jacobs obeyed.

"Then deliver it, and see Mrs. Cope is not kept waiting."

With this he left the house, and Jacobs felt that a crisis had arrived. He delivered the message with mechanical accuracy, and when he found it was received with apparent unconcern, he concluded his reasoning was at fault. Mrs. Cope merely told him to see the orders carried out, but when the door had closed on him, she and Lady Arabella held a council of war.

Lady Arabella did not thoroughly understand the situation. She accepted the position as it presented itself to her without enquiry, and indeed regarded it as in the ordinary nature of things, except that she thought Mr. Cope wanting in consideration. She was, however, enlightened.

"My dear," said Mrs. Cope, "this is not the trivial matter you think it. I am in doubt about these 'two gentlemen.' If they should be gentlemen it would not matter, but I am afraid they cannot be; and if not, your friends would be displeased."

Lady Arabella admitted this to be a most serious matter.

"What do you propose?" she asked.

"We are in the dark," was the answer. "But I would run no risk. Rather than do so, I would send for a doctor, and telegraph to everyone that I am down with a fever."

"You can do better than that," said Lady Arabella; "you can receive in another house."

"Excellent," said Isabel. "But how is that to be done?"

"Get out the brougham," cried Lady Arabella. "It's half-past ten. Time enough for the fever after two o'clock;" and

she rang the bell, ordered the brougham, and strode the boudoir like a war-horse.

Before one o'clock every expected guest had been apprised by telegraph that in consequence of an accident in the drawing-room of her house, Mrs. Cope would receive at No. 2, Assheton Square, formerly the residence of Lady Pomfrey.

By two o'clock No. 2, Assheton Square, was attacked by an army of decorators, and by eight it was a galaxy of light and a study of floral beauty.

In the meantime Mr. and Mrs. Cope had driven in the park: he in a spirit of bold vindictiveness, she with cold reserve, unimpassioned, and apparently undisturbed. Cope felt he was not getting on as well as he had hoped.

On returning from the drive Isabel enquired:

"Who are your friends who dine here to-night?"

"Tonks and Shorter."

"Who is Mr. Tonks?"

"An old friend of mine."

"And Mr. Shorter?"

"Another old friend."

"I will receive them in the drawing-room. If they do not please me you must excuse me from joining your party."

Cope bowed low as he did on the day he proposed. He was clearly not getting on.

Tonks arrived in good time. He was a rare old salt with a wooden leg, and was dressed in a flannel shirt, a waistcoat of blue and white stripes, and a pea jacket. His hair was abundant, dark brown and curly, his face beamed with homely good nature, and his beard, just turning to grey, was a mass of ringlets like the beard of an aged Satyr.

"What cheer, my sonny bo-oy," he roared as he caught sight of Cope on the stairs. "I've come yer see. You'll never find Tonks fail yer. Daun me, we've hauled at the same ropes for fifty year, and we ain't goin' to chuck over now"



And he went on roaring his complimentary aphorisms in unison with the stumping of his leg all the way up stairs and

into the drawing room, where he was received with calm serenity by Isabel, whose mere presence charmed him to respectful moderation.

"I hope I see yer well, my leddy," he said, with a wave of the left hand to the rear and a circular swing of the wooden leg to the fore, his ordinary method of respectful salute.

"You are welcome, Mr. Tonks," replied Isabel, "but I suppose Mr. Cope has told you that I am not able to dine with you, as I am engaged elsewhere?"

"No, my leddy," said Tonks with an appearance of surprise; "and I'm truly sorry to hear as you can't, my leddy," and with this he made another salute, gyrating on his left leg of flesh and blood, for Mr. Tonks was much impressed with the dignity of Mrs. Cope, even to a sense of awe.

Cope who was a silent witness to this scene had introduced his friend with a grin; he anticipated amusement at his bride's discomforture. Her manner, however, and the abashed condition of his friend dispersed the grin, and in place of it came the keen eager look indicative of repressed resistance and anxiety for the future.

Cope did not understand the situation and was compelled to wait. He could do no more than bow when Isabel turned to him and said:

"I am dining with Lady Arabella."

Bowing was a novelty in his experience, and Cope felt he was bowing far too much. He was awakening to the fact that he was in a subjective position, and that his bowing was the open expression of a moral condition to which he had hitherto been a stranger. He did not like it, but he bowed nevertheless.

"You'll dine with more freedom by yourselves, Mr. Tonks," suggested Isabel with another gracious smile that completely turned the head of the old salt, who made another gyration as he exclaimed:

"This is a proud day for Nathan Tonks, my leddy, to see my mate Cope in such a grand house, and you, my leddy, and all the rest."

The necessity for a reply was obviated by the introduction of Shorter, to whom, however, Isabel merely bowed on his being introduced, and with the simple words, "I will leave you now,

gentlemen, to enjoy yourselves," she left the room. She was not, indeed, fully dressed for the evening, having put on a quiet dinner dress for the comedy in which she had just been taking a part: and her maid Jacobs was waiting for her in her dressing-room with a marvellous effort in cream coloured brocade over which Lady Arabella had spent much anxious thought.



Cope's dinner was a curiosity. The *menu* was excellent, for it was the cook's; the service was precise for it was under the direction of the impassive Jacobs, but the guests were embarrassed by the variety of the dishes and the number of wine glasses. They were also embarrassed with each other, for no parasite ever loved a brother, and Nathan Tonks's contempt for Shorter approached the sublime. He once reviled his pretensions to clerical status, and described him as "a parboiled imitation of a sky pilot." The vigour of his criticisms of Shorter caused the cunning clerk to preserve a complete silence in the presence of Tonks, and this added to the oddity of the dinner, which was enlivened only by a series of panegyrics by Tonks on the position of his shipmate Cope, and the surpassing grandeur of his bride. Later on he reverted to the earlier years of their companionship, talked of the old smuggling days, revelled in

the recital of contests with the coast-guard, and recalled the incident which resulted in the scar on Cope's face.

"Aye, aye, my sonny boy, stirring times them afore the forties," said he. "No such fun now-a-days ; no chance of slaps in the face like that o' yourn. All humdrum and respectability Daun me if it ain't sickening," and he scowled at Shorter as the type of modern degeneracy.

Shorter resisted the temptation to retort ; and his apparent indifference excited the malignity of Tonks, who, after rolling



his eyes at the clerk for a moment or two, exploded upon him a torrent of questions, all calculated, in his opinion, to exhibit the debased condition of Shorter and his own superiority.

"What do *you* know about the forties?" he growled. "What can yer know? Who's Shorrocks?" he shouted, with an aspect of triumph and menace glimmering through the haze of rum that obscured his intellect. The question was followed by a gleam of suspicion on the part of Shorter, and a lunge on the part of Cope at Tonks's live leg. The effort to

silence him was not successful, and before another could be made, Tonks had shouted with additional vehemence :

"You don't know Omah. How could yer? Why, you wern't born in '48. You're a chicken—a ignorant chicken."

"Tonks," said Cope, with desperate emphasis, "Tonks, you're drunk and playing the fool."

"Ah, maybe, shipmate, maybe," replied Tonks; and then a look of cunning passed over his face as he added, "Aye, drunk, so I am—very drunk—drunk and dreamin' of old times—Shorrocks's times. Ha, ha," he chuckled, "Them was the times. No chuckle-headed, white-livered swabs among us then. All men, real live men," and he struck the table and looked defiantly at Shorter.

Apart from this episode the domestic situation continued to increase in embarrassment for Cope. His dinner was over and the reception had not commenced. What had occurred to prevent it? He could not understand what was going on in the household outside the dining-room, and dared not ask. The fact that he dared not ask was in itself singular upon the part of a man whose capacity for daring was his most striking characteristic; but he felt that he had been foiled, and he was afraid to ask, because the mere question would have been a confession of failure. They had reached the rum and cigar stage without hearing any sign of visitors. Some carriages had drawn up at the house, but they had passed on again. Cope had observed this, and did not understand it any more than he comprehended the absence of bustle in the establishment. Joshua Cope came to a wise conclusion. He got rid of his friends and went to bed.

In the meantime, No. 2, Assheton Square was all ablaze, and Lady Arabella triumphant. The people she had most wished to come were present, and her hostess and *protégée* was, beyond comparison, the most striking figure in the assembly.

"It's true the Duchess didn't come, my dear," said Lady Arabella in the height of her enthusiasm, "but that would have been too much at first."

The Legislature was pretty well represented, but Mr. Crawley Foyle had not received a card. Some were there who were to be seen in the very best houses; but the motives which impelled them to come were mixed, and not of the most worthy

sort. None, however, guessed why the "At Home" was given, not even Lady Arabella, nor did she imagine any other motive could inspire the breast of one so eminently fitted to adorn a drawing-room than a wish to become recognised in society.

David Thresher came late. The invitation had disturbed him. It suggested possibilities which were repugnant to him, and his imagination ran riot in the secret recesses of his mind. The brief message he had received by Arthur Foyle had destroyed all feeling of antagonism to Isabel, and had awakened a determined resolution to assist her. His passion for Isabel was revived in intensity, was unalloyed by a single selfish hope, but was fired by bitter anger towards the authors of her unfortunate position. He approached her in the course of the evening with every appearance of suppressed emotion, and if Lady Arabella had been near she would have made a discovery; for notwithstanding Isabel's power of self-control, she blushed and trembled at the touch of Thresher's hand. Her welcome was almost a whisper.

He was satisfied. The pain, the misery, the anguish of mind, the bitter contempt were all dissipated; and for the moment he forgot that they were irrevocably separated. It was enough for him that she had sent for him, and welcomed him as she had never done before—without words it was true beyond the common-place, but with the very manner and tone of love.

"I must speak to you before you go," she said; "wait near."

Lady Arabella was bearing down upon them. She was a great student of the emotions, and an idea had occurred to her.

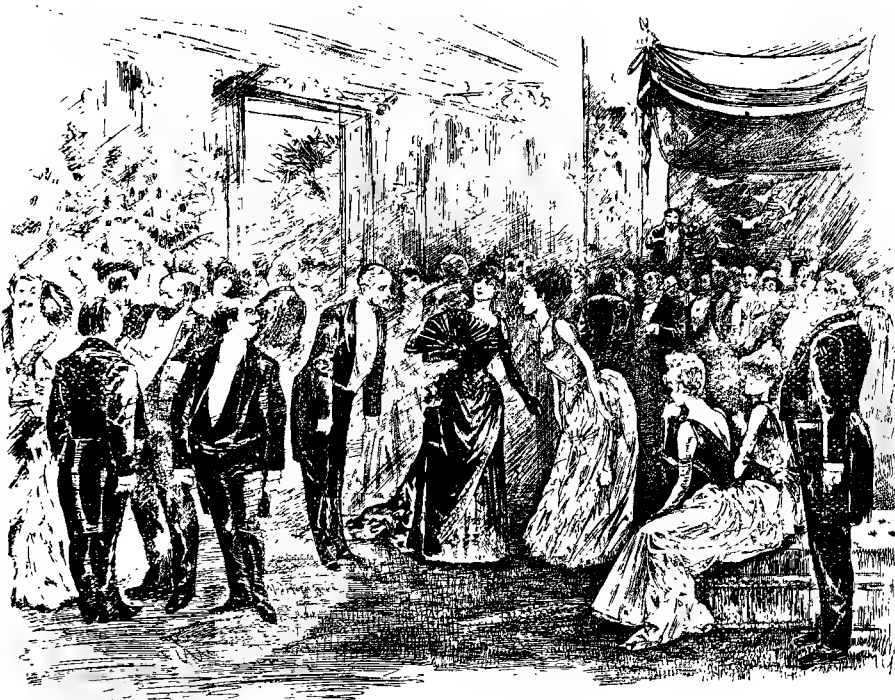
"One of your friends, my dear?" she queried. "Quite a handsome man. A perfect treasure, my dear. Nice to have men like that about."

Isabel beckoned David Thresher and introduced him.

Lady Arabella bowed with becoming reserve. David Thresher could have had no conception that she had said "such nice things" about him. He made one or two common-place remarks, and would have left her, but she, still in pursuance of the idea that had occurred to her, detained him, told Isabel she had just turned on the French conjuror, and left them together.

Lady Arabella was a dexterous woman; she knew exactly what to say and do, as for instance when people asked her

"Where Mr. Cope was," she answered: "Oh, he's not here, doesn't care for this sort of thing: he's thinking of his money bags, my dear."



The French conjuror attracted everybody's attention save only two, and Lady Arabella's delight at the expertness of the sleight of hand was heightened and capped by the pleasure she experienced in contemplating the result of her own perspicacity. Lady Arabella was confirmed in her idea.

"I have but one thing to say," said David Thresher, not looking at Isabel, but straight before him after the manner of those who hope to conceal from the crowd the earnestness of their conversation, "I sympathise with you, and you may command me in anything."

"I know it now," was the reply. "I am going to Brighton to-morrow. I shall be on the pier every day when the band plays. That's a clever trick," she added, looking towards the conjuror. "How delighted everybody seems."

She hadn't the slightest idea what the French conjuror had done, but she was well pleased that others liked it. The "At Home" indeed was a great success. Lady Arabella said so,

and Isabel was perfectly satisfied. So was David Thresher within limits ; but a future had opened up to him.

Next morning Cope received a letter from his wife. It was brief, and a mere record of a domestic fact. It said :

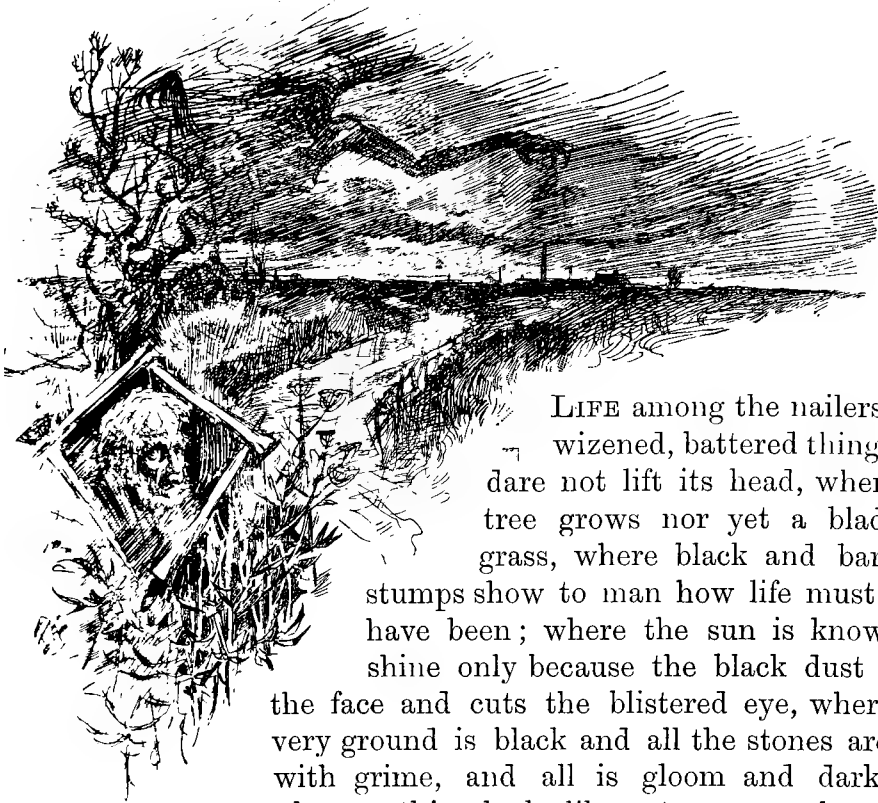
“Mrs. Cope is going to Brighton to-morrow, with her mother. She has undertaken the responsibility of the establishment formerly maintained by Mr. Foyle, who will not again reside there. A room will always be at the service of Mr. Cope, whether Mrs. Cope is there or not. The servants have orders to this effect.”

This ought not to have been an exasperating letter, but Cope received it when in the act of dressing, and having read it, he uttered an expletive, which for rudeness could scarcely be surpassed. Not only so, but he changed all his clothes and left within an hour for Halesowen. The situation had become intolerable. He concluded it would be impossible for him to make headway on the lines his bride had chosen ; his only chance lay in complete retirement for a time, a review of the situation, and an entirely new attack on fresh lines. By way of change, he would seek amusement by a few weeks' residence among the nailers. He hated them because he oppressed them, and he proposed to renew his energy in the contemplation of their misery.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAND OF DEATH.



LIFE among the nailers is a wizened, battered thing that dare not lift its head, where no tree grows nor yet a blade of grass, where black and barkless stumps show to man how life must once have been; where the sun is known to shine only because the black dust bites the face and cuts the blistered eye, where the very ground is black and all the stones are hid with grime, and all is gloom and darkness, where nothing looks like nature save the night and then the stars shine, and those who dwell upon this blighted plain feel they live in common with their fellow-men--because there is a Night.

Joshua Cope went down to settle accounts with his nailers at Halesowen because he had been worsted and his self-esteem needed a tonic. He went where he felt himself strong, where he could trample down and lay waste at will. He knew the nailers were his slaves and bowed to him because they must have bread; and he let them have an ounce or two for fear they should die outright and be no longer useful. Like Death he preferred a little life lest there should be

nothing left to wrench and grind and torture out of being. So the nailers were born to work and to die.

Men talk of life as if it were a living thing; men talk of growth as if it were a force essential, yet here and there within this land of plenty and of greatness we are shown that there is but one all-pervading power, and that is Death, but one triumphant influence Decay. Life after all is but a feeble resistance of Death, a mere effort to repel. We fight against the all-conquering power from the day of our birth—we fight against the cold that checks and the hunger that kills, but in the end we each and all succumb. We help each other in the struggle as we have all been helped and shielded and nurtured by the mother who bore us and the friend who would have us remain, but it is only for a time. Even if one helps to give a life to the world it is but another effort to carry on the conflict with the one stern, irresistible, all-conquering activity. The future has much in store for us, but as we see it Life is a poor weak thing at the best, and to some it is a barren waste, all parched and black and withered. With these Death is in the ascendant from the hour of their birth, and to most of them the end is Relief.

Some there be whose sense of being is continuous, who rejoice in a Life that is perfect in its strength, beautiful in all that encompasses it, and endless in its vista of hope. These acknowledge not Death, but as a symbol, and they triumph in their Faith. But this is not for those who strive and work in endless battling for bare existence in the scenes that men have made for those who live by Effort, not by Life itself. Base passions and the instincts of the brute exhale from such a soil. What can there be of love and hope and gentle culture when the little children have no time to weep, much less to laugh; when all that ever is or was or can be in their horizon is the cold drear waste of blackness and the ceaseless toil to make the little that the stunted lives must have, or die?

What life can that be which awakes in a hovel next a forge where nails are made, where not a breath of pure and honest air can ever work to give to man the life that lives and bursts upon the world with all the wondrous works of Life itself? For such poor souls Death is pre-eminent, and they struggle on, fighting for they know not what, not even cursing fate; but

always striving for the something better—and that the Life unknown.

Cope's warehouse was a dreary building. It might once have been a farm house. Perhaps it had known the smell of new-mown hay and meadow-sweet. Many years before it had been whitewashed, and nails could be found in the walls as if a creeper had once grown around the grimy windows. Ruined outhouses stood in the rear, and what appeared to be the wreck of a threshing mill lay scattered about, mingled with scrap iron, broken castings, and other embellishments of desolation.

Inside his warehouse was Joshua Cope, appropriately dirty and full of venom. He stood in the doorway of a large low room, smoking, with his hands in his pockets and glaring at a strange old man busy packing the nails into bags.

Ebenezer Warp had a weird face, all seared and yellow with straggling locks of hair that would have been white if whiteness could have been in such surroundings, and with eyes that made one pause. They were almost colourless, but fascinated by their immeasurable depth, and the sudden flashes that seemed to dart from them at times alternating with weary dulness. His back was bent with years and rheumatism and his arms projected behind him when he stood as upright as he was able. He was always thinly clad, and moved about mechanically with his shirt sleeves rolled up above his elbows and with an apron of sacking more ragged and shapeless than his miserable garments.

"No one's robbin' yer as I knows of, Mr. Cope," he was saying in a weird, far-away voice, "I'm not larned, and I can't reckon accounts, but I can weigh the nails and give the price c'rect, Mr. Cope."

"And tell lies," was the sardonic rejoinder.

"No, Mr. Cope, not lies," he said, and then he stood, and as he looked at his master there seemed to grow in his face a look of imprecation, heroic in its intensity for the moment, and then it passed away into blank desolation and he fell to filling the bags of nails with the dull weary monotonous motion of the mill horse.

Joshua Cope smoked on and watched as he stood in the doorway. He was not ill-pleased; he was altogether reckless of the pain he caused, and the manner of the old man amused him.

"What's all this," he asked, "about some new warehouse being started?"

"It's not a warehouse," exclaimed Ebenezer excitedly. "It's a factory where men can work and earn enough to keep their homes in comfort."

"Oh," grunted Cope.

"A factory," resumed the old man, "well-built and clean and new, where men will get good wages and have a home."

"What's a home, Neb?" asked Cope with a stolid look. He was getting angry.

The old man turned and his eyes lit up for a moment as he answered:

"A home is a place where the young 'uns are cared for, and the old 'uns can get rest o' evenin's afore they die."

"Oh," grunted Cope, "and who's building this fine place?"

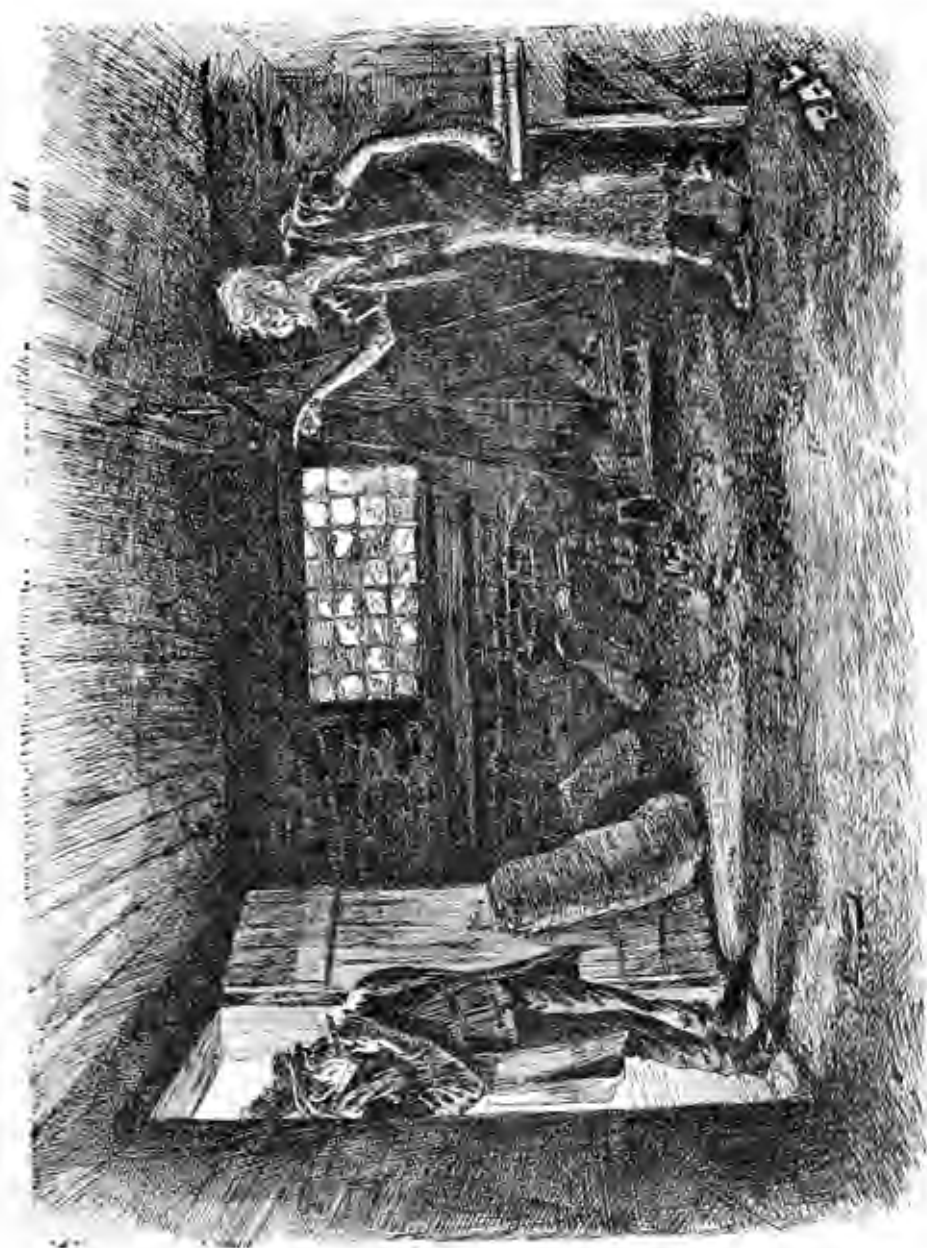
Ebenezer shook his head as he walked across the room with a bag; and when he had set it down, he said:

"A stranger; an old man, name o' Speezer. A stranger: but he's ne'er been hereabouts."

Ebenezer returned across the warehouse waving his arms as much in the air as his bent form would let him, and crying as he did so: "A stranger, aye, a stranger."

The gloom of twilight was coming on, and the small and dirty windows of the warehouse admitted little light. The old man continued working away—filling and weighing the bags, and the long arms spread out and the ragged white hair streamed hazily in the gloom. He looked like a spectre Joshua Cope thought, and he smoked with vigour to dispel the illusion. Presently he began to growl out horrible oaths. That reference to a stranger seemed to him to partake of a criticism and a rebuke, so he cursed the stranger, and Ebenezer, and everybody.

The old man continued filling and weighing the bags, and when he had cleared away and packed up the whole heap of nails he swung his arms around in the air and did his best to straighten himself. Then, with a weird look at Cope, he lifted up his right hand and menaced him from out of the gloom with words more terrible than curses and oaths, for the voice, though thin and plaintive in its accents, sounded to Joshua Cope like inspiration, for the words were true:

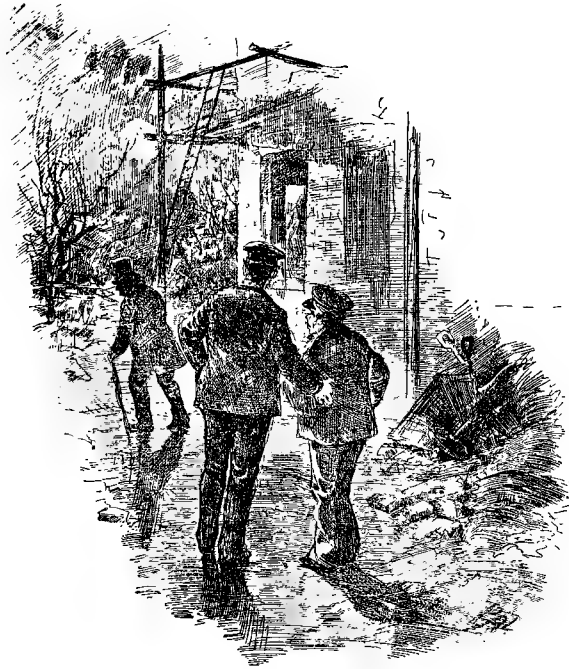


“Ye may curse and curse, Joshua Cope; you may foul yer soul with blasphemy, but ye cannot stop the coming day. I’ve worked here, man and boy for sixty year without a break and have only now to die. That’s not the life for man to live; it’s not the will of God, Joshua Cope! It can’t a be—it can’t a be, and the curses that you throw at us lie black upon your own soul.”

He went out with his coat under his arm muttering as he went all the way to his home, and there he found the whole family still at work. His daughter hammered at a rod of iron making horseshoe nails; her two girls aged sixteen and seventeen and a boy of twelve were at similar work, and the bellows was being worked by a little crippled girl. Their father was dead.

Late that night Joshua Cope made a pilgrimage to the new building, and there being no watchman or guard he walked in and examined it. The scheme was quite plain to him. At one end of the building was a boiler set, and near it the seat for an engine. From this extended half a dozen long alleys on each side of which were set up little forges. They were all furnished with blow pipes, but no bellows. The blowing was to be done by the engine, and the air would be driven through a coil of pipe in the furnace so that it would reach the fires tolerably warm, and the workers had need only to turn a tap to get their blow. Cope looked upon the idea of saving the work-people the trouble of blowing as folly, but there was something else at which he became angry. In a compartment next the engine there was set up a machine, the purpose of which he could not at first comprehend, but on examination he found it was designed to produce wrought nails in the rough. The rod was inserted between rollers that simply squeezed the iron into shape and then cut the nail apart so that it needed little more than sharpening. This machine was for horse-shoe nails, but there was another for flat-headed nails that was only partly built. The scowl on Joshua Cope’s face as he looked at them gave way after a time to a malicious grin. As he turned to go he came dead into the arms of an elderly gentleman of benevolent aspect dressed in a pea-jacket and a yachting cap. Cope concluded it was Mr. Speezer come on a visit of inspection, and he thought the time oddly

chosen. Mr. Speezer was accompanied by a little man, also in yachting costume, who seemed unusually active for his years, and whom the elderly gentleman of benevolent aspect called Cheriton.



CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAND OF FASHION.

LADY ARABELLA loved Brighton, and naturally sacrificed herself for "dear Mrs. Cope's sake" by accompanying her. Brighton is, and has always been, a wonderful place. You may dress five times a day and promenade a hundred miles a week without being remarked on as singular: all your neighbours do the same. Isabel gave Lady Arabella a room at the top of the house, which she protested was delightful, and she was incessant at the toilet and the promenade.

"My dear, I sympathise with you," said Lady Arabella. "Your position, my dear, is difficult. You need someone with you who understands the difficulty and can assist you to surmount it."

Isabel was not quite sure that the necessity was urgent, and she felt Lady Arabella was a little tiresome, but the situation was new, and she thought it prudent to resign herself to the intrusion.

Accordingly, they dressed, perambulated and drove and sat on the pier, and generally pervaded the miscellaneous throng that ebbs and flows on the shore at Brighton with the persistency of the waves themselves, and Isabel found the Lady Arabella a complete directory of everybody resident in the town, whether temporary or permanent.

Residence at Brighton is dictated by various motives. The man who draws his nets in Threadneedle Street and likes to sleep at Brighton, travels a hundred miles a day between his bed and his business, and calls it rest. The Billingsgate Fish salesman finds it convenient to sleep near the Monument and take his lunch in the domestic circle at Brighton. The politician imagines Brighton air productive of ideas, and the man of leisure discovers charms in Brighton flirtations that are unequalled in any place under the sun. The snob flourishes there as a restrained growth during the major part of the year, but develops the full efflorescence of his species in the season recognised as especially set apart for him. Surrounded

by the objects of his idolatry, he offers them the incense of imitation.

Associated with the aristocracy and aromatic with traditions of royal favour, Brighton has become the home of conventional propriety. The ladies take everything as a matter of course; the frail and demure are alike circumspect, and Mrs. Grundy is triumphant on the surface. The result is at least a decorous crowd.



Isabel had always been given to pensive reflection, and life had become more of a riddle to her now than ever. Why she was there at all; the feeling of restraint or depression under which she laboured; the indefinable hope of future happiness; the crushing fear of an intervening catastrophe contributed to a condition of quiet reserve, and she endured Lady Arabella in much the same way as reasonable people put up with the band at a theatre. She listened to the conventional chatter and responded absently. Her toleration of Lady Arabella was inexplicable on ordinary grounds, and she resisted the temptation to search for a definite solution of the phenomenon. She instinctively refused to look at the truth. She remembered the "At Home;" she remembered her invitation; she encouraged the hope that it would be responded to, and yet all the while she dismissed the thoughts and put them aside as if they had

no existence. Lady Arabella was thus a convenient counter irritant.

And as they rode and drove and walked and sat, Lady Arabella reviewed the human sea that eddied round them. The stout man with the red face and the elaborately curved hat was Sir Reginald Ball, once a Cabinet Minister, but now concerned only about the colour of his mail phaeton and the polish of his boots. The lady with the pink complexion and yellow hair was Mrs. Bowcher, whose husband was a man-milliner in Bond street, and that accounted for the marvellous dresses she wore : she advertised the business. The tall man, all elbows and stride, was Mr. Richmond Pilcher, a stockbroker, who advertised himself. The extravagance of an occasional special train to take a friend home to dinner was part of his system ; so was his town house, vulgarly magnificent and devoid of comfort ; too big for a Duke, but too small for Mr. Richmond Pilcher, or at least he said so.

"They say, my dear, such people are necessary," said Lady Arabella, describing this curious development of the 19th Century. "It's very unfortunate, but we must put up with it."

The necessity for Mr. Richmond Pilcher's existence was not quite apparent to more accurate thinkers, and none knew better than he how precarious was the footing of the commercial tight-rope dancer. Upon occasions he persuaded himself that he served a purpose in the commercial world, and custom, personal extravagance and the fraudulent intent of those he served combined to explain if they did not justify the ridiculous disproportion between his services and the emoluments he exacted. But there he was in the Brighton crowd beside many other extravagant examples of modern civilisation, such as the young peer who dressed as a groom and boasted that he had never entered the House of Lords, the decayed financier who lived on the bounty of his friends whom he had made rich, the most successful tailor that the world had ever produced, and a leading actress accompanied by two coronets and a budding poet. There they were as they may be found any day with variations of character and quality according to the season ; but all with a decorous exterior and the heart and the passions crushed out of life or battened down and in any case well hidden out of the way.

On the third day after their arrival, the incident that Lady Arabella had expected came to pass. David Thresher was on the pier in the neighbourhood of the band ; and there was a formal greeting with a timid hand-shaking and a brief common-



place conversation, just as much demonstration, in fact, as courtesy demanded, and nothing more.

"So glad, my dear," said Lady Arabella. "So glad I was with you when Mr. Thresher came upon us. So much better. My husband blew his brains out because a gentleman was too attentive to me. I don't think Mr. Cope is that sort of man, my dear, but it is so much better to have some one about who can make statements if required."

"I don't anticipate any statements will be required," said Isabel somewhat coldly.

"No, my dear, probably not," said Lady Arabella pursuing the subject. "It is not what should be actually required, but what people think and say ; and it is always best to be prepared. You know Mr. Thresher is very handsome—very "

The subject dropped. Lady Arabella feared she had said too much, and Isabel preferred not to have hints dropped of disagreeable possibilities. Silence was natural when each had

food for reflection, still it was odd that two people apparently to all the world the best of friends should be walking side by side with a wall of ice suddenly reared between them that neither felt able to demolish or even recognise.

And perhaps the oddest part of this juxtaposition, so common in the more highly wrought friction of social life, was the fact that nothing that Lady Arabella could say would have altered the course of Isabel's mind. The delicious essence of a forbidden hope pervaded every fibre of her being. Her danger lay in the fact that she approached the sweet contemplation of these grave sensations with the knowledge that there was danger in them, and with the proud belief that she was superior to all possible evil from such a source.

So the waves beat upon the shore and the people surged upon the beach, and Mrs. Foyle gazed upon her daughter wistfully and with a feeling almost of awe. She did not dare express the sympathy she felt. She doubted in the helpless humility of her nature whether she ought to feel sympathy for so great a creature as Isabel. She looked on fearful and amazed.

So also as the waves beat upon the shore and the people surged upon the beach in this little area, the larger world swayed on in all the interminable variation of its absorbing ambitions, its petty interests, and its boundless passions, unknown and uncared for by the promenaders who conceived that all the ends of creation were fulfilled if only they dressed five times a day and walked decorously.

David Thresher was among the few whose objects were more definite if not more commendable. His resolution to go in pursuit of his uncle was abandoned for the time, though not wholly. He had not yet construed his immediate purpose. He would have confessed to an engrossing sympathy and a desire to relieve severe mental distress, nothing more. It was imperative, he thought, that he should have at least one interview with Isabel that should wipe out all past misconstructions, and if not actually to horoscope the future, at least, not to aggravate the misfortune that obscured it. Lady Arabella's conception of the necessities of the position resulted in the same conclusion, and she took steps to provide an opportunity, which should be consistent with conventional propriety, and of course within her knowledge.

It is difficult to say to what extent Lady Arabella apprehended the true character of her position in relation to "dear Mrs. Cope." The habit of living in a given station without the means to sustain it results in the cultivation of tastes in excess of one's resources, and gradually provokes the victim to actions that, without being positively mean in themselves, approach the dishonourable, and in the result become despicable. Lady Arabella would have been honestly shocked at the suggestion that she was assisting to provide a pit-fall for a friend in order that she might have the credit of relieving her in misfortune, but Lady Arabella was doing a good deal worse than this and did not know it, only because she declined to think about it. "Dear Mrs. Cope" was in a very disagreeable position with a wretch of a husband, and she was determined to make things as pleasant as possible for her. Lady Arabella therefore had a mission.

When three people conspire together to realise an object wholly within their capacity, it would be wonderful if its achievement were prevented. Mrs. Cope and Lady Arabella met David Thresher on the pier, and Lady Arabella, discovering she had a headache, found the band rather distressing where they sat, and thought she would walk up the pier and back. The two remained. A public pier with a band playing is not a place for clearing up past misconception and devising a future plan of action. What then was more natural than the making of a future appointment.

When Lady Arabella returned she found her two companions gravely and silently listening to the band as if they had not exchanged a single word during her absence, and in truth the words exchanged were very few—about a couple of dozen—and Lady Arabella was puzzled to know what had happened. She remained in ignorance, but concluded that, an opportunity having been given, she had nothing more to do but wait events. Her feelings, however, were somewhat ruffled by that species of nervous irritation which comes of doubt whether one has not been foolishly eager concerning other people's business or foolishly neglectful about one's own. Lady Arabella, indeed, was conscious of a new sentiment concerning her friends. She resented their contentment and still more their reticence.

Still the waves beat on the shore, and the people surged on the beach, all unmindful of what was borne on the boundless ocean, and blind to the tangled wilderness of hopes and ambitions spread beyond that petty strand. The meagre horizon within range of the human eye and the human ear was strikingly illustrated by the indifference of these Brighton promenaders, while events of the first importance to themselves were maturing in more than one direction with the resistless growth of time. The strange old gentleman of eccentric habits, tended by the faithful Cheriton, and mysteriously crossing the path of Joshua Cope far away in the Black Country was typical in relation to these listeners to the band, of the ridiculous limit of man's capacity. Man is regarded as a superior animal, but his eminence is reared on an exceedingly narrow platform. The beasts of the field are conscious only of the immediate present with just a dash of memory; and philosophers tell us that man is superior to the beasts because he has imagination and cooks his meat, but even with these qualities he is so little better than the beast that when he follows his imagination he pursues a mirage, and he usually destroys his meat when he cooks it. There is much truth in the saying that few see further than their noses, and some at least in that Brighton promenade were living in a fool's paradise of the security of ignorance.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CATASTROPHE.

THE world is governed by jealousy. Some call it love and some ambition, but when all is said and done and all philosophy is exhausted, the motive for all Worldly effort is discovered to be jealousy—jealousy of possession; and is not this the mother of all ambition—even the ambition of love? What single act of any member of the seething crowd called “Society,” within its inmost heart, or helplessly whirling in its outermost eddies, can be named that does not spring from jealousy of the meanest sort? Its very laws are the product of the jealousy of the impotent!

The effort of original genius alone is prompted by a higher motive than jealousy, for since the world is indifferent to the aspirations of genius and laughs at unrealised inspiration these efforts excite no concern. The World is not jealous of conception. It is fruition, whether of original genius or of worldly effort, that alone awakens jealousy; and this same fruition creates copyists by the million, all resentful, eager, jealous and therefore active.

Lady Arabella had never risen to the height of the jealousy of the passions, but she had now become a prey to the meaner envy of resentment at the happiness of others. She was content so long as she controlled the arrangements—so long as she was stage-manager of the drama—but she assumed the airs of Mrs. Grundy herself as soon as she found the play went on without her. She must therefore have recourse to all the petty artifices which give piquancy to Society’s monotonous round.

Isabel was reticence itself. She had all her life cultivated that charming accomplishment—an intelligent repose, and only a surprise would cause her to betray her emotion. But Lady Arabella could work and wait. She did work; was immoderately amiable to dear Mrs. Cope, profuse in suggesting the precise methods by which time was to be killed during the next four and twenty hours, and generally pieced out the minutes so as to see which were already appropriated.

"You look a little pale, my dear; you should take a drive to-morrow—a long one."

"No, I think not," was the answer; "I've a little headache and feel tired. Some extra sleep will cure that."

Then, after a pause, Lady Arabella would say:

"I'm sorry you're worried, dear."

And Isabel would shrug her shoulders, and answer:

"I mustn't make the worries worse by thinking of them."

About four o'clock, Isabel, becoming tired of the attentions of her friend, recalled that she had not visited Miss Winscomb since her marriage, and went upstairs to make a call.

She was opposed at the door of Miss Winscomb's apartments by Martha, who barred the way with menacing gesticulations, and made it almost impossible for Isabel to advance without actual rudeness; but Isabel saw Miss Winscomb's cap towering in the distance over the back of her chair, and attributing Martha's demonstration to her habitual antipathy to visitors of all kinds, she put her aside with a graceful smile, and greeted Miss Winscomb with another.

She was met by a stolid stare, and then she realised that a change had occurred.

"I hope you're not ill," she said with concern.

"No," was the answer, in deep guttural tones. "I'm well, very well, but I'm not receiving visitors to-day"

The old lady's eye glistened as she said this, and she looked almost fiercely at Isabel, who answered that she was sorry she had intruded, but thought that she was an exception to the strict rule.

"Isabel Foyle was an exception, but not Mrs. Cope," said the old lady firmly. "Martha," she added, "didn't I say I was 'not at home' to Mrs. Cope?"

"Yes, Miss," said Martha, and both of them fixed their eyes on Isabel, the one head as firm as a rock, and the other spasmodically oscillating behind it.

There was only one possible termination to the interview after this. Isabel rightly concluded that nothing she could say would alter the view her old friend had taken of her marriage simply because that view was the product of a confirmed prejudice. She did not fully realise this at the moment, was a little nettled at the reception given her, and

her consequent embarrassment caused her to make a somewhat lame exit. She apologised, the two pair of eyes continuing to glare at her, and she left the room with a feeling of distress.

The dinner party that evening was a sombre one. Isabel's headache was a reason for her silence, Mrs. Foyle was sympathetically quiet, and Lady Arabella was reflecting. The situation to her was absolutely incomprehensible, and when Isabel retired to her room at ten o'clock, she accompanied her on the Christian mission of bearing some portion of her burden. That she could acquire not only a portion of it, but the entire load, was her hopeless prayer.

"I'm so sorry you're indisposed, my dear," said Lady Arabella. "I did not wish to excite your dear mother's apprehensions, but throughout dinner you have looked positively ill. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing," said Isabel, with a weary sigh. "I have merely a headache and feel very tired."

She sat herself near a side table in a low easy chair with a languid air, sighed, and removed a brooch.

Lady Arabella sighed too.

"You know, my dear," said she, "I think you are fretting; you are in a sense unconsciously pining; you think too much of what *might* have been."

Isabel shrugged her shoulders and said, still languidly, "No, I occasionally doubt whether life is worth the trouble, but perhaps to-morrow I may think it is," she said, loosening her dress.

"To-morrow?" queried Lady Arabella, with emphasis.

"Yes, if the wind isn't still in the east."

Isabel had let her hair down; she swept it all back and then lay upon it so that it formed a rich back-ground to her massive neck and shoulders with the light full on them and the brow shaded on the left side, one of those wonderful pictures that are seen only in camera, which come to pass by accident; so beautiful and so free from everything suggestive of decay that the human form seems something more enduring and more pure than the common stuff that men and women are made of.

Lady Arabella was too practical a person to be envious of the possessor of such charms. She indeed experienced a

passing sensation of admiration, which was dissipated only by her chagrin at Isabella's reference to the east wind.

Isabel drew off her rings and then rested her head upon her hand, a picture of weariness. Lady Arabella could no longer disregard the suggestion. She was profuse in expressions of sympathy and regret and left Isabel in the hands of Jacobs. Ten minutes later, Jacobs was dismissed for the night and then a change occurred. There was no more langour, no sighs, no headache, but a vigorous brightness and elasticity—actual life.

Isabel commenced to re-dress herself, not in full walking costume, but in a loose robe of maroon silk, quilted with down and drawn in at the waist with a girdle. She did up her hair in rich rolls, concentrating on the crown of the head, and fixed it with a diamond-hilted dagger. She wore only a single ring—one that David Thresher had given her six months before—five diamonds set in a plain hoop—and with noiseless silken slippers on her feet, her toilet was complete.

By this time it was a quarter to twelve and dead silence prevailed, broken only by the rolling of the waves and at rare intervals the passing of a carriage. Isabel reflected a moment, and then moving a small lamp to a table near the window she drew the chintz curtain aside so that the light might glint through the venetian blind. She then waited another five minutes without any signs of weariness or fatigue, but with a calm expression of habitual content upon her face; and when the hands of her watch approached midnight she unlocked her door, crossed the hall to the front door of the house, fixed back the latch so that the door would open with a push, and placed the corner of the door-mat against it so that it would not open without pressure. She then calmly walked to her room and sat peering through the chink of her barely open doorway into the darkness of the hall.

That indeed was a moment of excitement. Her heart beat heavily and she trembled, for although she knew that in a single moment she could close and lock her door noiselessly, and that the fact of the front door being open would have no apparent connection with her, yet the concentration was extreme, and the minutes hours.

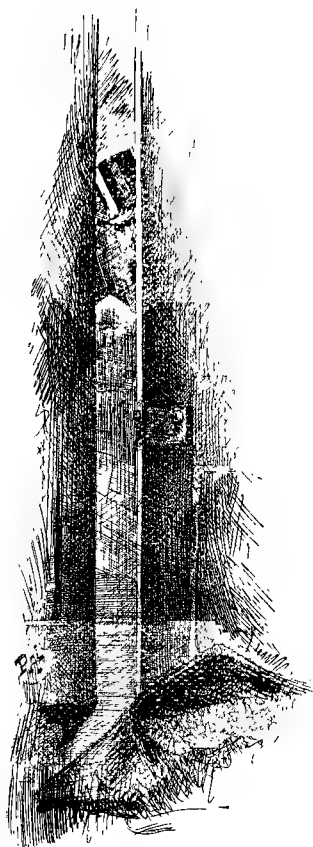
But most lovers are punctual, and before the chimes tolled twelve, she heard the noise of a pressure on the door-mat. She immediately opened her door wide, crossed the hall to let

in her visitor, and pointing him to her room, closed the front door. In a trice she was locking her own on the inside. She then, with extreme rapidity, closed the chintz curtains, lowered the lamp, and whispered to her visitor, who stood just within the door, as he had entered :

“Sit down ; but do not speak yet.”

She then listened at a second door, from behind which she heard the heavy breathing of the constant Jacobs.

Then came a pause, during which, hidden by the gloom, she put her hand upon her breast to restrain the impetuous beating of her heart and the wild vibration of her nerves. The incident she had planned with so much care was accomplished. The risks attending the enterprise had so far been evaded ; but the calmness of a strong nature during the period of resolute action was followed by tumultuous emotion now that a crisis had arrived. The stillness of the night, the hour, the necessity for even increased caution added to her agitation, but the opportunity was precious, and with a sudden impulse she walked across the room put her hand upon Thresher's shoulder, and said in low tones :



"I have asked you to come here, because I wished to give you the fullest proof of my trust in you, and because I could contrive no other opportunity for those mutual explanations our case needs."



Thresher bowed, in silence, and then with a sudden impulse, he said passionately, with his arms encircling her :

"Why explain? Why speak of the miserable past? It is enough for me that we understand each other. I think only of the future."

She did not answer, and he drew her close to him. Folded in each other's arms they revelled in the awakening of new anticipations. Her lithe and sinuous form, embedded in the downy robe, with passionate involutions was embraced by the lover of her youth. All the melodramatic speeches they had

framed for each other's edification and their mutual justification in circumstances scarcely in accordance with the proprieties evaporated; every prudential consideration was cast to the winds and passion rose with the nervous touch, the hastened pulse, the wild delirium of the burning kisses on those lips that had not yet been sullied by the mercenary husband's breath.

"I have kept myself for you," she whispered. "Nothing but death can prevent us enjoying the happiness in store for us, if we have but the courage to wait—nothing."

"Your words are indeed comfort to me," he responded. "It has been hard to bear, but now we are within hail of the heaven of our future; and, with the hope you give me, to wait is easy."

"Oh, God!" she exclaimed, clinging to him passionately. "How have I suffered! The memory of my desolation makes me tremble again."

"And you will be desolate again."

"No, for I have seen you, my beloved, and I shall know that you are waiting for me with loyal hope."

"Yes, yes, but I'm afraid it will be a weary waiting. Must we wait for days that may never come, when the world is wide, and love is ours, all ours? I'm fearful, Isabel, that the depth of our love will be our daily trial. Are we really to part? Have you properly estimated your power of waiting? Do you really think you can endure it? Are you quite safe to rely on security from danger? What of those whom we must regard as our enemies? Will not malice devise some means of harassing you?"

"Do not tempt me, David."

"But we may meet sometimes?" he pleaded. "We can surely engage in the ordinary courtesies of life."

"I'm afraid," she answered.

"Of your husband?"

"No, of myself, afraid of everything and everybody except my husband, whom I despise, because he bought the right to tell the world I was his wife—bought it with gilded lies, that hid the malice of his thoughts."

He kissed her on the brow, and answered:

"Still we must meet, not often, but we must not deny ourselves a few precious moments, such as this. Let us part

for a time—for a month, for two months, or even a whole year, only let there be a time to look forward to when we can say, ‘On such a day we are to meet.’ It would be for you to choose the time and for me to come whenever and wherever you may appoint. I will go away. I will go abroad if you wish it. I will treat you with indifference, if we meet before the world. I will avoid all actions that may betray our relations. I will do anything that discretion may suggest, only do not say we may not meet.”

“Have patience. Trouble would come of meeting—more trouble than would come of flight, because flight is open.”

“Then let us fly : I’ll go anywhere you like to name, and I will so arrange that none need know till we are safe abroad.”

“I wish I could.”

“You can. See how easy it would be, and how just. You have been wronged more than any woman. You have been tricked into a marriage that is not a marriage. You have assented only to a conventional alliance. You are not a wife, and you have no husband. You have made only a business contract, and you are free to cancel it because it was based on fraud and deception.”

Isabel merely sighed in response to this impetuous outburst, and then whispered, with a gentle pressure of the hand :

“Still we must wait. There is something you have forgotten.”

“And what is that?”

“My mother. I cannot leave her; she needs me. She suffers, too, as much and more than we, for she is weak.”

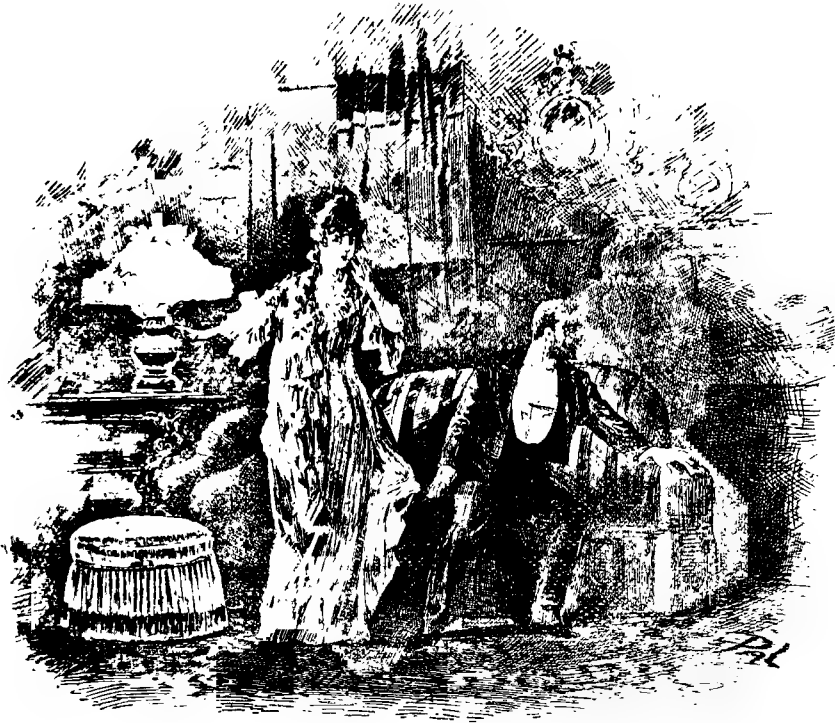
Thresher was abashed.

“No,” said he, “you must not leave her. We must endure.”

Then they drank again a long deep draught of love, for “sweet remembrance,” they said, in the passionate incoherence of their happiness; and then they fell to planning for the future a series of signs and counter signs, occult methods of communication should ordinary correspondence be denied them; and, despite the decorous resolutions of the hour, meeting places were agreed on, and times and seasons fixed. Throughout it was understood Isabel was to be the fugleman; it was Thresher’s part only to obey, and he was to come even from the ends of the earth, when opportunity was at her command. So they whispered on,

forgetful of their misery, and, sealing their oaths of love with fervent embraces, they revelled in the ecstasy of love.

But suddenly the delirium was checked by a sound. The



front door had opened, and a muffled footstep crossed the hall.

With a look of horror and awakened resolution, Isabel rose from the couch on which they sat; her face blanched; the wreck of lover's kisses in the broken braids of hair upon her face; the deep set frown of resolute purpose on her brow. In an instant she had extinguished the light, and after a long drawn out moment or two of suspense, David felt her hand upon his shoulder, and then her hot breath whispered in his ear:

"Keep absolute silence. Someone has entered the house. My door is locked. On no account stir from here. We must watch."

The suspense was terrible to both of them. Not a sound could be heard save the sonorous breathing of Jacobs the maid, and this from its monotonous character added to the ghostly character of the incident.

A feeling as of imminent peril crept over Isabel. It needed all her powers of self control and cool common sense to dissipate the anxiety she experienced. As if to convince herself of safety she whispered :

“No one can enter here. The door is locked.”

“Hush,” exclaimed Thresher ; “there’s a sound.”

A shambling footstep was again heard as of one slowly and cautiously moving across the hall. The person was returning no doubt to the door to leave the house. Thresher was conscious of the departure of Isabel from his side, and the slight rustle of her dress indicated that she had crossed the room to the window. Neither spoke.

Looking across the room, Thresher could see that Isabel had put aside the curtain and had raised one of the laths of the Venetian blind. Her face was dimly lighted by the street lamp, and her anxiety was shown by the eagerness with which she peered through the chink.

As she waited and watched the front door was opened. This was indicated by a slight rattle of the dangling chain. It was probably brushed by the garments of the intruder and hit the door on its recoil. Then there was a pause, and thereafter the door was closed—obviously with the key in the lock to prevent the click of the latch. The next moment Isabel saw the figure of a man slowly move down the steps from the hall door keeping as much as possible in the shadow of the portico.

“Good God,” she ejaculated. “What can this mean?”

It was Joshua Cope’s figure she saw leaving the house.



She waited at the window, watched him cross the road, and saw him stand looking at the house. She still waited after he had turned and passed out of sight, not with the expectation of seeing anything further, but considering what she should do and say

It must have been five minutes before she returned to David Thresher from the time she had left him.

"Do not move yet," she whispered; "it's nothing, but it is necessary to be careful."

* * * * *

Next day, at half-past eleven, Mary, the junior domestic in the service of Miss Winscomb, met with death in a sudden and mysterious manner. Soon after she had eaten her lunch she became dizzy, and expired before assistance could be summoned.



CHAPTER XIX.

THE CONSEQUENT ENQUIRY.

DR. FLOUT was a man of principle, and expected everybody else to be guided by principle. He did not care what the principles were, whether good or bad. All that he wanted was that men should have principles and act up to them. His leading principle in life was to be quite sure where he was. "Let me know where I am," said he, "and then I can act."



Accordingly, when he was called in to see Mary and found her quite dead he struck an attitude, placed his right hand on the

kitchen table, bent his lank body forward and pinched his blue and rugged chin with his left thumb and finger. Then he rubbed his hand over his short stubby hair, coughed and addressed the world in general as represented by Mrs. Shilton, who acted as cook, and Martha whose whole body quaked and shook as she fixed her eyes on him.

"Now," said he, "in a case like this it is essential to review the situation."

Then he waved his hand as if he were giving a professional lecture—he always thought he should have been a Professor—and added:

"If you don't define your position you don't know where you are, and if you don't know where you are, why, of course, you're lost, and that's a position in which no man of principle should be for a moment. Now, I repeat, let us see where we are. In the first place, she's dead. That's clear. Then you say she was taken soon after eating her lunch half-an-hour ago; that was 11.30. Now where's the food she didn't eat?"

"Where's the victuals she didn't eat?" repeated Martha in sepulchral tones shaking her head at Mrs. Shilton, a widow of fifty-five who had the misfortune to be nervous.

Mrs. Shilton looked sideways at the doctor, holding the bottom hem of her apron in her hands, and working it backwards and forwards.



"There," she said, "them crumbs of bread and butter, and that drop of beer in the glass."

"Where did she get them from?"

"From the pantry."

"Now, there you are," said the doctor in triumph. "Let's take them back to the pantry and then

we shall have the whole case clear."

They did so, and then he locked the pantry door, and put the key in his pocket.

"Now," said he, "as I don't know what the patient died of I cannot certify, so I'll report the case to the coroner and give him the key of the pantry. Then he'll know where he is."

So saying Dr. Flout took up his umbrella, put on his hat and strode out of the house as if he were in a violent hurry to find out where he was.

"Mrs. Shilton," said Martha, "you must help me with the mistress to-day. She's waiting for us. Come." And then she added glaring at Mrs. Shilton, and shaking with unusual violence :

"I came down for Mary, but she's dead. You must come instead."

Mrs. Shilton followed with a scared look, as if she had been responding to the summons of an evil spirit, when Martha turned and said :

"Mind you don't say a word of this to the Mistress. I'll tell her, and mind what I say."

With this injunction they entered Miss Winscomb's bedroom, and Mrs. Shilton nearly swooned as she heard Martha say in her usual monotonous tones :

"Mary's not very well, Miss, and the Doctor says she must lie quiet, so I've brought Mrs. Shilton instead, Miss."

Miss Winscomb wanted to know what was the matter with Mary, and Martha replied that she had eaten something that hadn't agreed with her, a reply that may be described as strictly accurate.

Later on in the day Martha paid a visit to her mistress and reported that Mary was seriously ill :

"Nothin' ketchin'," she added reassuringly ; "inflammation, the doctor says—inflammation of the bowels, and the doctor says it's very dangerous."

"You must take care of her, Martha," said Miss Winscomb. "Mind she wants for nothing, and get her well again as soon as possible."

"Thank you kindly, Miss. I'm afraid she won't get over it. Mary's very careless, Miss—always was very careless—never think's of what she's eating, like you and me, Miss."

"Unlike you and me, Martha, you mean," corrected Miss Winscomb.

"Do I, Miss? Well, we're always very careful, Miss, but Mary isn't, and she's taken somethink that has not agreed with her, and I don't think she'll get over it ; indeed I don't, Miss ; she's very bad indeed."

Then in response to sympathetic comments by Miss Winscomb she said :

" I must leave you now, Miss, I'm going to get some arrowroot for Mary. The doctor says she must have nothing but arrowroot and milk."

And so she shambled out of the room, jerking and twitching as if she would break her poor old body in pieces, and going downstairs she muttered with horrible grimaces, clutching the bannisters as she jerked herself down :

"It was poison : the doctor said as much ; and it wasn't meant for Mary No, no, not for Mary."

And all that day the old woman went about twitching and jerking and muttering. It was a wearing time for Martha with her shattered nerves and feeble old frame, but she never for a moment thought of herself. Her devotion to her mistress absorbed and controlled all other obligations. She was a heroine in her sublime indifference to truth, when a circumstantial prevarication would save her mistress a disagreeable sensation. Now and then in her mutterings she would say :

"It was Mrs. Cope. I know it was Mrs. Cope. I hate her. We must get her out of the house."

There seemed to be no limit to her devotion ; it reached zealotry. She went, in spite of her infirmities, to the butcher's herself, bought the necessary mutton-chops, and had them cooked under her own eyes. Her own life she regarded as precious only because it was necessary to the preservation of her mistress's. She was of the stuff that martyrs were made of. She would have walked barefooted on red hot iron for an idea, and have gone to the stake glaring at mankind in triumph rather than recant. She was precisely that class of being that creates by the fanatical



realisation of their own small part in the small span of human life, the larger drama of communities, and nations, and epochs.

And when the case assumed proportions beyond the capacity of the local police, and our old friend Slade was brought down to put the facts together, Martha took him aside and said :

“Come, before you see anything or say anything, I want you to know about mistress.”

And Slade, nothing loth, was led away by the arm and was twitched, and jerked, and vibrated into a comfortable arm-chair, and Martha sat herself down opposite to him, and after a few preliminary gyrations levelled her eyes at him and began :

“Mistress is an invalid, and she’s 75, and if she lives she’ll inherit a mint of money, and there’s people wish her dead.”

Then came a pause, and the keen eye glistened the brighter, and no matter how the head jerked, the eyes fixed the placid Slade who waited patiently for more. It came with a rush.

“Mary was my niece, but the mistress doesn’t know she’s dead, and she must not know ; it would be a shock to her ; you’ll want to see everybody, but as she knows nothing, she can tell you nothing, and I thought it best you should see her first and then you’ll understand.”

Josiah Slade assented. He was, as usual, receptive, and disposed to encourage communications.

“Then,” said Martha, “I want you to say you are the doctor, and that Mary must be removed to the hospital. Come.”

This rather surprised Slade, who was not used to being taken in hand in this peremptory manner, but the force and decision of the old woman’s character had its natural sway, and Slade was led upstairs in a reflective mood, not quite sure what he would do or say.

Martha, however, was quite sure what she would say, and, opening the door, with Slade at her heels, she said in solemn tones :

“Mistress Winscomb, here’s the doctor ; I’ve brought him to tell you Mary must go to the hospital.”

"I'm really very sorry to hear it," exclaimed Miss Winscomb, who was quite gay on that particular morning, "Is she very ill, doctor?"

"Seriously," said Slade with a bow.

"Then do the best you can, doctor, and spare no expense."

So the interview ended, and Slade commenced his investigation, not absolutely clear about the rights and wrongs of this little comedy in which he had taken a part; but being then only on the threshold of his enquiry, he put the incident aside as part of the case for future consideration.

It took him some time to go through the household in his easy-going, undemonstrative way, and when he had come to an end of the enquiry he found himself in possession of a curious array of facts, several contradictory suspicions, but nothing conclusive, beyond the unquestionably solid fact that Mary had died of poison. The precise nature of the poison was undetermined, and how it had come to be taken by her was a profound mystery. Examination showed the presence of cyanogen in company with the food last eaten, but nothing of the kind was found in the remnants that remained. The position of Mary in the household, and her relations with everyone about her, forbade the idea that she was the victim of malice; and she had absolutely no connections outside the household. There were but two solitary facts to show that she had not met death accidentally; the deadly quality of the poison, and the almost positive presumption that it could not innocently have found its way into the exclusive circle of Miss Winscomb's household. The questions Mr. Slade therefore asked himself were: "How did the poison get there? Why was it put there? And who put it?" Or, in other words, the method, the motive, and the person, for criminal investigation, like moral philosophy, physical science, grammar, and theology, resolves itself into a trinity.

Mrs. Shilton's scared appearance and nervous manner impressed Slade greatly, but in her case the motive would be necessarily inadequate, and would have probably originated in mania. Mrs. Shilton, however, had not been outside the door of the house for a month, and had received no letters or parcels for herself. The poison was probably the Cyanide of

Potassium, in use among photographers, but she knew none of these mechanical artists, and had never heard of Cyanide. The scared manner of Mrs. Shilton was put aside along with his interview with Miss Winscomb, and the review of facts was continued.

Martha's theory was precise and thorough-going in the extreme. She measured out the probable thoughts and actions of others in accordance with her own resolute uncompromising habit. She laid it down that the poison was intended for Miss Winscomb and not for Mary, and she did not hesitate in her private interviews with Slade to state her positive conviction that the author of the crime was Mrs. Cope. She supported her theory by showing motive, opportunity, and immediate cause. The wife of a competitor in long life with Miss Winscomb was the natural enemy of her mistress. The cold reception of the day before gave ground for suspecting special animosity, and her residence in the household gave ample opportunity.

This was a remarkable indictment, but Slade was not disposed to endorse it. His interview with Isabel, commenced in the presence of Mrs. Foyle and Lady Arabella, and ending with herself alone, gave no results. He was much influenced by the belief that a person of her decision of character would not have missed her mark so completely by disposing of the wrong person ; and he was still more impressed with the fact that they had not a single incident to support Martha's theory beyond the circumstance that Mrs. Cope was the wife of her husband.

"That," said Slade, "is not enough."

Having passed everyone in the household in review, his mind reverted to Mrs. Shilton, whose scared manner indicated unusual concern. The motive on her part for the act was not apparent, but it was part of Slade's system to look for abnormal, not ordinary motives. It was consistent, he reasoned, that so extraordinary an act as murder should be prompted by an equally uncommon motive. It was certainly wrong to assume that an ordinary motive should induce so extraordinary an act as murder. Pursuing this course of reasoning, he was strongly inclined to regard Mrs. Shilton as the only person worthy of suspicion, so far as the range of his enquiry had extended. Mrs. Shilton was resident in the house,

and habitually in the kitchen. She was present during the meal which seemed to carry death with it; and a motive could perhaps be discovered. Slade resolved to enquire further as to the cause of Mrs. Shilton's timidity and nervousness, and he pressed Dr. Flout into the service.

"Doctor," said he, "I want to have a conversation with you. I want you to come into the kitchen with me. I want you to stand with your back to Mrs. Shilton so that I may see her face, and I want you to follow my lead so that I may see how she takes our conversation."

"Oh!" said the doctor, "your wants are numerous and precise."

"They are," replied the detective; "I want to see how Mrs. Shilton behaves when I say certain things I have put together."

"Do you wish me to say anything?" asked the doctor.

"No, sir, unless anything particular occurs to you. I propose to ask you questions and see how your answers affect the old lady."

"You must not expect me to assert anything not strictly accurate," said the doctor.

"No, certainly not, doctor."

"Nor admit anything I cannot prove."

"Of course not; we will simply go over the ground."

The doctor was prevailed on, and the detective propped himself up against the dresser in full view of the fireplace, and of Mrs. Shilton, taking her tea.

"Now, where are we?" enquired the doctor.

"Nowhere, at present;" said the detective; "but we're getting on the rails."

Mrs. Shilton gave a little start, and seemed inclined to weep.

"In the first place, doctor," continued the detective, much encouraged by Mrs. Shilton's manner, "it's a clear case of poisoning. *You* say that?"

"Unquestionably," said the doctor, stamping his umbrella on the floor with decision.

"Then you say, doctor, that the poison must have been taken in the house and in this very room, eh?"

"Certainly."

"You say this, doctor, because the action of the poison is unusually rapid?"

"No doubt."

"And, therefore, you assert that the poison must have been administered by some one within the house."

"Unquestionably."

"And by some one who must have been near about the poor woman shortly before her death."

"Obviously."

Mrs. Shilton was in the act of swallowing a spoonful of egg as this remark was made; dazed as she was, the horrible inference presented itself to her with startling effect. She nearly choked, then swallowed some hot tea, and choked the more. Recovering, she stared vacantly at Mr. Slade, who appeared not to notice her, and went on eagerly with his argument:

"Now, doctor, the poor woman was taking her lunch, here at this table. She had eaten an egg and some bread and butter, and had drunk some beer; and she was dead before she had finished her beer. That was so, eh, doctor?"

"Precisely."

"Well, doctor, you then say there was no poison in the beer, and that the poison in question could not have been put into beer without destroying its character?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Then we dismiss the beer; and we dismiss the egg, because people can't get inside eggs; and we have the bread and butter. How about the bread and butter, doctor?"

"Can't say," said the doctor. "There was no poison in what was left; no sign of it. Nothing!" he added with a snap of his jaw.

"How much of this material would kill, doctor?"

"A minute fragment. A piece as big as a pin's head might do it."

"Suppose such a piece had been dropped on the bread and butter?"

"That would do."

"Or put into the spoon?"

"That would be more easy."

"Then," said Slade, with an airy wave of the arm, "anyone in the room could have done that?"

“Unquestionably,” rejoined the doctor, who, in response to a sudden change in Slade’s countenance, turned to look at Mrs. Shilton.



She had risen and was holding on to the mantle-shelf with one hand, and was stretching out the other grasping at the air as if for support. All colour and expression had left her face, and her attitude was that of one suddenly bereft of power. Slade thought this the natural effect of his reasoning, and was gratified; he was even elated. The doctor, careless of everything but professional obligation, turned to assist the poor woman, but before he could reach her she had swung round and had fallen dead upon the hearth.

CHAPTER XX.

EGG FLIP.



NOTHING in the whole range of social phenomena more clearly illustrates the finite in man,—nothing is qualified to reduce him more completely to a sense of his weakness and deficiency than the contemplation of a sudden and mysterious death. Mr. Slade had achieved the conviction, by a process of reasoning, that Mrs. Shilton had poisoned her fellow servant, and on the instant of his triumph, the whole of his argument was destroyed by an appalling fact, obviously identical in its origin with that he was engaged in probing, but which, instead of enlightening him, aggravated the obscurity which bewildered him. Slade was humbled.

“Doctor,” said he, as soon as the immediate consequences of this fresh catastrophe had subsided, “I am not pleased with myself. I feel mean.”



Doctor Flout frowned, pinched his chin, and nodded, but said nothing.

Slade was not the egotist that is often created by the occupation he followed, and he appreciated to the fullest

extent his folly in attempting to arrive at a conclusion by a mere review of probabilities. He had once been a conjuror, and knew that an audience is deceived only because an essential fact is hidden. He knew also that completed crime was a riddle because the criminal's first object was to hide, destroy, or distort the incidents and appearances associated with the criminal fact. Slade accordingly made a fresh start.

"Doctor," said he, "this is a serious business, a very serious business, and I shall not leave this house till I can see a clear roadway."

Dr. Flout nodded again.

"Doctor, it's clear they didn't both commit suicide. Do you think the second one did?"

Dr. Flout shook his head.

"Doctor," continued Slade, "it's in the food. There can be no question of that. We opened the pantry this morning. It had been closed ever since No. 1. To-day we opened it and we have No. 2. Doctor, we must concentrate on the pantry, and as far as I can see we must concentrate on bread and butter and eggs. The bread did not come from the pantry. All that was there was stale and was thrown away. The butter was there and so were the eggs. I want you to join with me in an inspection."

They went into the pantry, and in addition to the remnants of Mrs. Shilton's tea, they found a crock half full of salt butter and two eggs—part of the original store. Slade asked the doctor to examine the butter, and he did so by plastering it out in thin layers and smelling it. He found no trace of the pungent odour of cyanogen, and declared the butter innocuous.

"And what's the use of looking at the eggs?" said Slade despondingly, balancing one in his hand. "Fowls don't lay poisoned eggs."

"No," said the doctor, taking up the other. "They don't."

And the two men each balanced an egg, and each laid it down in the plate from which they had taken it, utterly at a loss to know where and how to move in the great quest they were engaged in. Then they frowned and looked gravely at each other, and at the floor and at the ceiling, and gradually

Slade concluded he was of no sort of use, and that the doctor was worse even than himself.

"You see," said Slade, "I'm not a doctor, and I can't put two and two together in poisons. I want to see how the poisons was used and then I can move."

He said this in a spirit of remonstrance. He wanted to rouse Dr. Flout to action by irritation, but before the doctor could answer the two investigators were startled by the appearance of Martha, who rolled her head about with more than usual energy as she said :

"Mrs. Cope and her mother have gone to London. Their servants follow in an hour or two. Me and the mistress'll be all alone."

Slade made no response, and the weird figure continued :

"Do you know where she's gone, policeman?"

"Yes," said Slade, "she gave me her card."

"Ah, a blind," said Martha with increased energy, "but she doesn't deceive me. No!"

Then came a pause. The two men made no response, and Martha said :

"I want some eggs. I want some egg and sherry for mistress and egg and brandy for myself."

"Here you are, Martha," said Slade cheerily, as he handed her the plate. "There's only two, Martha, and if you like we'll come and help you mix 'em."

The old woman worked her way to the kitchen, and they followed, Slade bearing the eggs, which would certainly not have arrived in safety if Martha had attempted to carry them. The situation pleased Slade. It was one of those cases of natural movement that sometimes developed important points; something akin to tossing a straw in the air. And it was an odd sight. A doctor of medicine and a member of the detective force assisting a decrepit old maid to make an egg flip.

They proceeded with much circumstance.

The utensils were all arrayed before Martha, who broke first one egg and then the other in separate cups. Then she smelt them according to the custom of the kitchen, and pronounced them sound, but suddenly she was seized with unusual excitement, and called the doctor's attention to an extraordinary fact. Sunk to the bottom of the cup she had observed among

the albumen two white balls similar to the grains of pearl barley in appearance, only smaller and less spherical. The doctor looked at them, frowned, and reflected.

Dr. Flout reflecting was a powerful sedative. No one could possibly encourage excitement in the presence of Dr. Flout imbued with the professional instinct, not even in a kitchen with an audience of two. The reflection was not unproductive.

"Observe, my dear sir," said he, "those little white balls embedded in the albumen of a boiled egg would be of the same colour and apparently of the same density as the white of the egg itself."

"Ah!" exclaimed Slade, and his eye gleamed at the sight: "Fish 'em out."



The vernacular was offensive to the ears of Dr. Flout, astride the forensic charger; and with visions of future audiences consisting of the entire nation, he lifted his eyebrows, and said:

"Mr. Slade, allow me! Let us first consider where we are. We have broken an egg, and we have found it presents to us

nothing singular. We have broken a second egg and placed it in a separate vessel, and we have observed that it contains in partial suspension two small globules, white and opaque ; and we observe that they have no relation to the germinal vesicle of the egg, but are wholly separate from it, and obviously a foreign substance—a foreign substance, Mr. Slade.”

“How did it get there?” asked the detective, beaming with delight.

“My dear Sir,” said Dr. Flout, “we are coming to that. It has been put there,” he added in triumph.

“Yes, put there,” exclaimed Martha trembling, “put there. The eggs have been changed.”

Slade was awakening to a true sense of the position. He had sobered down to common matter of fact procedure ; and, looking at the simple fact of the discovery of foreign matter in an egg, he urged a closer inspection of the globules. One of them was accordingly put upon a clean plate, crushed and examined. It proved to be a cyanide, and the fragments were washed off the plate and gathered in a third cup, partly in solution and partly solid, for future more minute tests. An examination of the shell of the egg disclosed a small hole drilled in the side and afterwards closed with plaster of Paris. The work had been done with extreme neatness, and despite the horrible consequences of the act, did not fail to excite the admiration of the two investigators. Martha, however, gave way to passionate denunciation.

The other egg presented none of these features ; but further enquiry showed that the one Mrs. Shilton had eaten had a perforated shell, and had no doubt been furnished with the fatal globules.

How had they come there and for what purpose ?

This was the question Slade had to solve, and the presence of a definite quest put him at comparative ease. Up to this time he had been absolutely in the dark. He now, however, knew what he had to look for, and before the night was out he had made another discovery.

One of the ordinary constables, whose dull intellect had had time to resolve the occurrence of two sudden and mysterious deaths in three days, informed his superintendent that on the night before the first death, he had observed when on his beat,

that a tall man, well dressed and with the collar of his coat turned up, was observed to leave the house at half-past two in the morning and to walk towards the centre of the town at a rapid pace as if fearful of being observed.

It became Mr Slade's duty to discover this tall, well dressed man.



CHAPTER XXI.

“ THE SURPRISE.”

DAVID THRESHER was, comparatively speaking, at ease. He had come to recognise the impossibility of realising his desires by any course other than the dishonourable, and he was resolved, if not content, to wait. Whatever possibilities had presented themselves to him in anticipation of his visit to Brighton they were dissipated at the very moment they should have come to fruition. He had experienced with crucial force the common experience of mankind that the actual, whether in controversy or in co-operation, can never be imagined ; and that of all the castles in the air that are ever built, those of the lover are the most preposterously grand and the most unsubstantial.

The absorbing passion having been assuaged by comparative failure, the necessity for delay prompted him to think about his uncle, and being reduced to common sense and an everyday programme, he sent for Eales ; but although the purpose of the interview was distinct, David Thresher devoted it to railing at mankind in relation, especially to his absorbing passion and the infamy of Joshua Cope. He experienced that sense of gratified egotism which is always associated with a review of one's ill-treatment at the hands of fate. He therefore recited with the most minute detail the commercial malpractices of Cope, the insufficiency of Arthur Foyle, the treachery of Crawley Foyle, and the consequent misfortune that had befallen Isabel and himself.

The consultation was carried on in Thresher's sitting-room, where the two, as was common with them, promenaded as they talked—declaiming, arguing, denouncing, exalting. Thresher was on this occasion in a superlative mood—no language was too strong to give expression to his outraged feelings, nor would he allow a single fraction of weight to any suggested palliative. Eales was naturally more generous, because he was not personally interested. He was not merely Thresher's solicitor ; he was also and before this his friend.

He directed his energies to enforcing a calmer view of matters, and he had the courage to present to his friend the cynical view the disinterested take of lovers' woes and generally of the misfortunes of others. He showed how absurd it would be to pretend that commerce could be conducted on any other principles but those of cupidity and greed.

“You must be careful,” said he, “that you do not carry your exaltation too far.”

“How can I?”

“Very easily. An assumption of superiority, however justified, is resented by the world.”

“What do I care for the world?”

“Nothing probably to-day; whatever your feeling at this moment you will most certainly come to respect the judgment of the world and be eager to have that judgment in your favour. This is what all men do, however much they think they do otherwise. You say you despise the opinion of the world, but to-morrow, next day, or a year hence, you would no doubt smart if people called you ‘priggish.’”

“Do you think me priggish?”

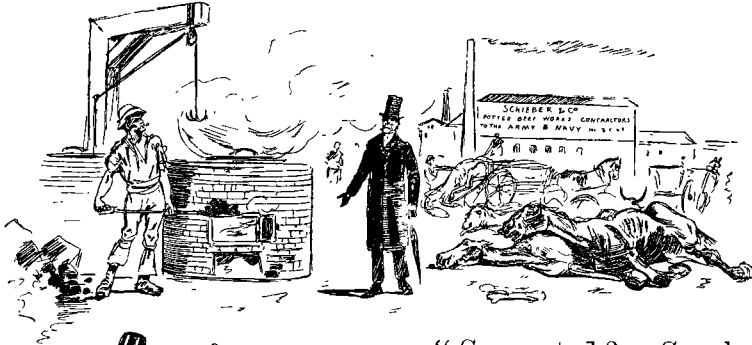
“No; but it's not a question what I think, or what you are; it is the appearance you present to the unreflecting and the reputation they give you.”

“What appearance do I present then?”

“Everything that is satisfactory to-day; but you may by your excitement be betrayed into extravagance of expression that the ill-informed will misconstrue. Not only should one not wash his dirty linen in public; he should not let anyone know he has any to wash. People do not like the man with a grievance. They think him a nuisance; but the man who fights in secret and wins they rejoice with, but only when he has won, not before.”

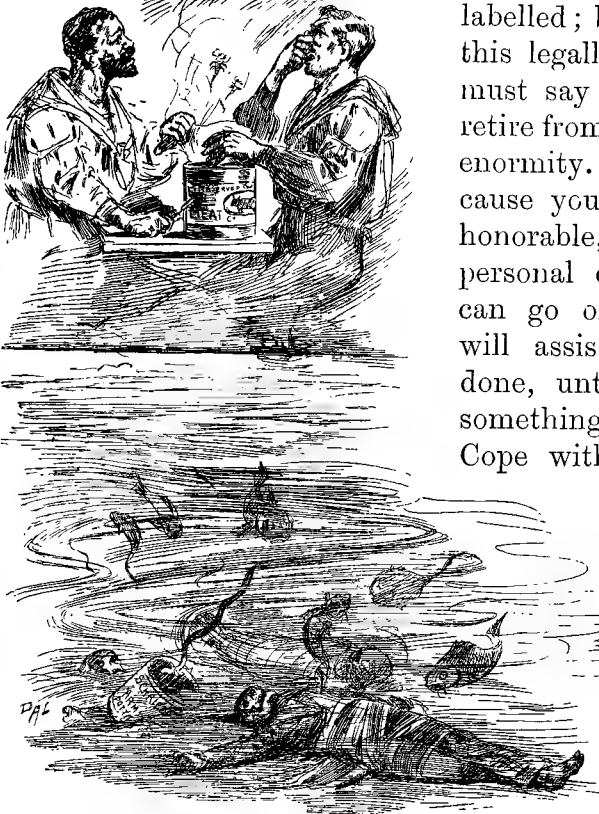
“But there is nothing people enjoy so much as a fight.”

“No doubt, but it must be a fight—an open, vigorous, active fight, for objects they comprehend, and on principles they appreciate. I don't think people would care much about your views of Schrieber & Co.'s procedure; and it is just possible, indeed probable, they would consider you foolishly nice to have retired from a remunerative business because you suspected malpractices.”



"Suspected? Surely you do not pretend it was only a case of suspicion!"

"Not to us. To me it is certain that Schrieber & Co., through the ingenuity of Cope, supplies diseased cows and horses to the British Navy and our merchant seamen in the shape of preserved meats highly seasoned, and elegantly labelled; but you cannot prove this legally, and therefore you must say nothing. You can retire from participating in the enormity. This you do because you decline to be dishonorable, but that is a personal consideration. You can go on enquiring and I will assist you as I have done, until we can light on something that will bring Cope within the law; but until we do this you had better keep your own counsel, and hide those deep emotions which stir your soul.



Depend upon it, the public would laugh at your denunciation of Cope.”

“I don’t care what others think or say, I know only what I want, and what I want I would spend my last farthing to achieve, even if I blew my brains out afterwards.”

“Then my dear fellow,” said Eales, “you would do a very foolish thing. The mildest manner critic would say you were ‘Quixotic,’ and most people would add something still more uncomplimentary. Your impulses are creditable and your object is commendable, but the self-constituted arbiter of justice is always regarded with supercilious contempt by the masses. A few think him a hero, but he would be far happier and more likely to do good as a social reformer if he left criminals to the ordinary operation of the law, and busied himself with constructive, not destructive philanthropy. It is not the purpose which is objected to, but the presumption. The public resent amateur censorship and laugh at heroics in the individual. If Cope’s villainy decimated our fleet in time of war, or if he poisoned any large section of the community by his trash, heroics would be acceptable; but any assertion on your part that Cope makes up diseased animals for the wealthy in the shape of potted meat, and for the sailor in sealed tins would be disbelieved, simply because Cope would show he disposed of his carcasses in the form of cat’s meat and patent manures. We know to the contrary. We know that only a small fraction of his carcasses go in this way, and that the major portion gets into the market of human food. We know that his sales of cat’s meat will not account for all the product of his works in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle, and Liverpool, but legal proof is not as yet forthcoming, and if it were, I don’t know how you could use it. You do not feel disposed to turn informer?”

This was a sad damper upon the ardour of David Thresher, who had worked himself up to a highly finished state of righteous indignation. There was no resisting the blunt common sense of his friend, and as he could not combat it he dismissed the subject, and introduced the matter they had met to discuss.

“What about my uncle, Eales?”

“I believe he is safe, and in seclusion of his own choosing. I believe also that when the proper time comes he will

announce himself to me as if nothing extraordinary had happened."

"Tell me the story," said Thresher, sitting down with a return of cheerfulness.

"In the first place, Maida Lodge has been watched day and night ever since Mr. Louison's disappearance and without result. The door has scarcely been opened, and no letters have been delivered to any one. But a week ago I was sent for by the manager of the National Bank to ask my opinion about a three months' bill that had been presented for payment by their Liverpool Branch for £5,000. It had been accepted by Mr. Louison and was drawn by Samuel Speezer. It appeared to be quite regular and there was nothing unusual about it beyond the fact that Mr. Louison had never before to my knowledge accepted any bills of any kind. I advised that the bill be paid but procured a letter to the manager of the bank where the cash would be credited asking that a representative of mine might be allowed to remain in the bank until Mr. Speezer made his appearance, so that I might be provided with a description of him. Next morning I received by post a statement to the effect that Mr. Speezer was a tall, elderly gentleman, dressed in yachting costume, and that he was accompanied by another shorter man, whose description tallies exactly with that of Cheriton. As soon as the two made application for the £5,000 my agent who sat in the rear of the counter as if he were a clerk communicated with a subordinate who followed the two men to another bank, the Lancashire and Yorkshire, where I have since ascertained they opened a drawing account with the five thousand pounds in the name of Samuel Speezer. They were then followed to the harbour, and in the course of the afternoon they took a boat that was waiting for them, and were rowed to a three-hundred ton schooner then lying at anchor. The yacht is named the *Surprise*, and she sailed that evening for we don't know where."

"Then you have lost them."

"Not exactly. The yacht can be traced, but there is something more. You know it has always been my custom to send in a series of statements of accounts every Monday recording the transactions of the previous week. I have continued to

do this, and the papers have been fetched away from Maida Lodge as usual on the following Wednesday, and brought back to me. I continued this practice because I am not supposed to know who examines the accounts, and also because I wanted to test the opinion of Scotland Yard that Mr. Louison was his own kidnapper. I found that the papers had been opened up and re-tied in a manner different from that I had adopted, but a letter addressed to Mr. Louison had not been opened, and was returned as I had sent it.”

“Then what do you conclude?”

“That Mr. Louison has by some means evaded the vigilance of my watchers and has actually returned to Maida Lodge and left it again; that he has means of doing this of which we are ignorant; that he does not wish me to know of his return, and therefore did not open the letter addressed to him; that money was necessary to him, and that he has created a three months’ bill so as to make it appear that he accepted it before his disappearance, and that he has opened an account with the proceeds in an assumed name. By what means he managed to procure an introduction to the banker so as to open the account I cannot imagine; but it is supposed he was introduced by the firm from whom he chartered the yacht. The signature of Samuel Speezer is not in Mr. Louison’s writing, but apparently in Cheriton’s. The accepting signature is Mr. Louison’s own, and perfectly regular. I conclude, therefore, that Cheriton has signed Mr. Louison’s assumed name, and that we shall hear very little of them for some months to come unless we go after them.”

“How can we do that?”

“Very easily. We have only to find where the yacht is lying and you can throw yourself in the way as if by accident.”

“But the yacht may be off before I can get to the port.”

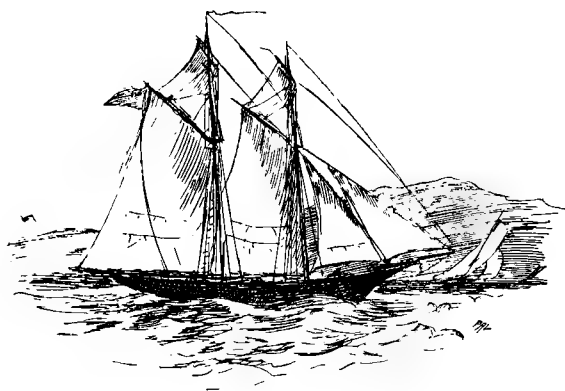
“Then you must try another.”

“But suppose if I do come up with them they say nothing. I should not feel disposed to intrude upon my uncle, especially when we know so surely he wants to keep out of everybody’s way.”

“That point may be considered when it arises, but I conceive it to be my duty to look after the interests of my client, and

it is his interest at present that his whereabouts should be known. Acting for you I have procured the assistance of Lloyds' intelligence department to find the yacht *Surprise*, and I feel sure I shall hear before the day is out where she is."

Eales was right. Before the interview closed a message was brought to him from his office to the effect that the yacht *Surprise* was anchored in Lammlash Bay, and David Thresher left London for Greenock by the Scotch mail that same night.



CHAPTER XXII.

A CLUE.

DAVID THRESHER breakfasted at the Tontine Hotel, Greenock, next morning, and at ten o'clock he walked along the Esplanade towards Gourock, a charming promenade with a magnificent prospect, but as there was no one enjoying it, David Thresher supposed the people, through national slowness of perception, had not yet discovered its beauties, or from prudential reasons, were slow to admit a partiality for the mild dissipation of a promenade. A telegram had informed him that the *Surprise* had left Lamlash Bay, for the Clyde, and as Eales's information was collected by an intelligent man, who whetted the energies of correspondents by promise of a guinea for each sighting of the yacht *Surprise*, David Thresher was further informed that the yacht was probably bound for Hunter's Quay, where the Regatta of the Phearshon Yacht Club was being held. Possessed of this knowledge, Thresher formed a plan. He would go to Hunter's Quay, and join, if possible, in a yacht; he accordingly telegraphed to Eales his address, till further notice, as "The Hotel at Hunter's Quay." The next thing was to get a yacht, a matter of some difficulty he feared, seeing it was the height of the season. To the westward he descried a man, dressed in weather-worn blue, smoking a pipe, with his hands in his pockets, as he gazed on the moving tide abstractedly. He was an elderly man, and Thresher noticed as he approached him that his face was wrinkled with an habitual frown and a persistent scowl about his mouth.

"It's a fine morning," ventured Thresher.

"Aye," said the smoker, still looking at the water. "It's jist that."

"Will it be fine to-morrow?"

The man looked at him enquiringly, and coming to the conclusion he was serious, he answered:

"There's nae tellin'; but it seems a wee bit inclined to be saft-like."

"Oh!" said Thresher, who was not quite clear as to the import of the remark. Then he asked :

"Can you tell me where I can hire a yacht?"

"What sort of a boat?"

"Anything, but it must be small; and steam preferred."

"When may ye want it?"

"Now."

The man looked at Thresher curiously, then scratched his head, and after considerable meditation, pointed out into the bay, and said :



"Do ye see the wee steamer yonder. Will that fit ye?"

"Yes; if she's manned and ready."

"Aye; she's ready the noo," said the man, and he went on smoking and gazing at the little boat as if she were a strange object of altogether rare and singular interest. Then after much apparent earnest thought, he said :

"She's the *Midge*. She belongs, ye ken, to Mr. Buchan, a

gentleman frae London, and he's away in his cutter, the *May Bell*."

Then he put his pipe in his mouth again, and gazed away across the water, as if he had settled every question that could possibly be raised for the next hundred years.

After a decent interval, Thresher asked :

"And how much a month do you think Mr. Buchan want for her?"

"It's no very certain he'd let you have her at all, ye ken," was the reply ; and the smoker again relapsed into a state of meditation.

David Thresher by this time found himself confronted by a serious psychological puzzle, and he pulled himself together to master it. There was a boat that would suit his purpose, and the man who was beside him could evidently direct him, if he chose, how to acquire the use of it. He made an effort, and put what he thought was a very direct question.

"Who's in charge of her?" he asked.

"Jest Tam," was the reply ; nothing more, and without a smile.

"And where is Tam?"

"Well, I'm no vara certain. Maybe he's aboard and maybe no."

"Does he live aboard?"

"Whiles aye and whiles no. Ye ken there's just a wee bunk for Tam, but naething like *accoamadation* ye ken."

This information was profusion itself, but Thresher did not seem to be progressing in his object.

He thought he would try a new line, and asked :

"Whom can I see about her?"

"See about her!" exclaimed the stolid one. "Aye, man, and ye must gae to Measter McCloo ; he's got the sellin' o her."

"And where is Mr. McCloo?"

"Will I tak' yer tae him?"

"If you please."

At last the course was clear, and as they walked the wary smoker extracted from the frivolous Southron that he was a stranger, that he was on an undefined errand, and that he was prepared to buy a boat if he could not get one by hiring.

After a long walk, they reached a shipyard, where they found abundance of timber and iron and noise of hammers and apparent confusion, and bye-and-bye, after being left alone in what appeared to David Thresher to be a waste of desolation, the taciturn smoker hove in sight, accompanied by a stout man, with a clear eye, and an open countenance, who turned out to be Mr. McCloo.

“You want to buy the *Midge*?” said he.

“I want to hire her.”

“Can’t be done.”

“Why not?”

“Because I have power only to sell. You can make up two berths in her, she’s got a good galley, and a surface condensing engine; and you can have her for £300.”

Mr. McCloo looked at his customer keenly to see how he liked the prospect, and finding hesitation in his countenance, advised him to give the boat a trial. If he would favour him with his company at the Phearson gathering that night at Hunter’s Quay, he would introduce him to the owner, and they could settle matters between them. Mr. McCloo further informed his visitor that he ought to have been away with the yachts himself, but that important business had delayed him, and if Mr. Thresher would return about four o’clock he would steam him across to Hunter’s Quay in the *Midge* herself, so that he might get a taste of her quality.

All this was very satisfactory to David Thresher who, to fill up the time, took a walk along the high road towards the Cloch light, and then, out on the Firth, he saw the fleet of yachts making long tacks, under a westerly breeze, towards the Holy Loch.

And as this casual tourist looked upon the peaceful and yet stirring scene, and revelled in the boundless prospect of bay and loch and rippling burn, of glen and moor and forest glade, Mr. Slade was, by a process of elimination, coming to the conclusion that David Thresher was the only person in any way associated with the inmates of Miss Winscomb’s household answering the description of a “tall and well-dressed man,” who was also in circumstances that admitted the suggestion of a motive for the acts committed.

And with the absence of perspicacity common to his class, he came to the conclusion that he had what is called a "clue." The fact that enquiry showed David Thresher had left his house for nobody knew where, confirmed Mr. Slade in the conviction that the clue was a sure one.



CHAPTER XXIII.

AN ACCIDENTAL MEETING.

DAVID THRESHER steamed over to Hunter's Quay, later in the day, with Mr. McCloo, under the vain impression that he was engaging in a commercial negotiation. The sale or chartering of the *Midge* was, however, the very last thing anyone else appeared to have in his thoughts. The entire population of the bay was bent on revelry, in which he was expected to take a part. He found himself the guest of Mr. Buchan, with whom he dined on board *The May Bell*, but whom nothing would induce to talk of the *Midge*, or of anything else other than the day's sport, or the Function of the night.

Life in the estimation of ordinary folk is made up of its festivals, and among those who live on board or in sight of yachts, the great Carnivals of the year are the Regattas. David Thresher was informed, with much fervour, by the four members of the Club, who dined with him, including Mr. Dugald, the secretary, a stout man of six feet four, with a voice like thunder, that there was no function, that ever had been devised to be held, from the foundation of the world, in any way to be compared with the Annual Function of the Phearshon Yacht Club, of which he was destined to be a guest that night.

In due time he was, with the others, on board the *May Bell*, rowed about a quarter of a mile to a large steamer that had been requisitioned by the secretary for the occasion, and then David Thresher saw his friend Mr. McCloo taking the chair for the night, as Admiral of the Club, for although most clubs are content with Commodores, the Phearshon Club would be content with nothing short of an Admiral as President.

The Admiral, having swung his mallet in the air, and commanded silence for the anthem, the Secretary led off with a Shanty song, imported from the slopes of the South Pacific coast, descriptive of the modest ambitions of an A.B., coupled with a melancholy refrain of regret at the contemplation of

his dollar and a half a day, which, as the anthem recorded, invariably proved quite inadequate to supply his desires. The whole company joined in the refrain, and the ponderous secretary swayed to and fro, pulling at an imaginary rope as he told with harrowing yells the story of disappointed hopes. How long the anthem was capable of being prolonged no one could say, as Mr. Dugald had never been known to come to a full stop of his own accord; and it happened on this, as on all previous occasions, that the anthem was brought to a sudden end, at the very height of its fury, by the descent of the Admiral's hammer, an incident that was supposed, according to the traditions of the Club, to represent the let-go of the anchor.

The Admiral then proposed the toast of "The greatest woman on earth, the Queen, God bless her," and this having been drunk, with Highland honours, the Function was declared open, and the business of the night commenced.

The business consisted in the consumption of large potations of whiskey and various descriptions of tobacco, varied by the telling of sea yarns, and the singing of songs of varied shades of delicacy and refinement, the whole being gone through with an air of solemnity and regard for rule and order that few assemblies could match.



It had come to pass that David Thresher sat on the left of the Admiral, with Mr. Buchan next, and it was observed that a chair had been reserved on the right of the Admiral for someone who was not present at the opening of the function. During the progress of the anthem, however, a handsome old gentleman, with white hair, and a genial smile, was conducted up the deck to the vacant seat, and was heartily welcomed by

the Admiral as Mr. Speczer, of the yacht *Surprise*.

David Thresher observed the incident with great delight, and up to this time it was obvious he had the advantage, for

his uncle's attention had been concentrated on the Admiral, and the way to get to his seat, while David Thresher had wholly escaped his notice, and was able to study the appearance of his relative, quite at his ease.

While the pipes and the glasses were being filled, the Admiral thought it becoming to introduce the two guests to each other on the ground that they had both come from the south, and as he did so, a curious look of intelligence almost amounting to a glimmer of cunning, broke over the face of the old man, so sure was he of the completeness of his *incognito*. He congratulated himself upon the superiority of his knowledge, in no way doubting that he alone was informed of the identity of his new acquaintance. On the other hand David Thresher, having the advantage of a few moments' reflection before being formally introduced was able to control his excitement, and left his uncle in entire ignorance of the fact that he was discovered.

It was easy for him, therefore, to speak by the card, when his uncle, with much of the old world courtesy of manner, asked him whether he had been long in the north, and whether he intended staying long. He answered, with comparative unconcern, that he had been somewhat disturbed by some disagreeable domestic incidents, and he had been advised to seek a renewal of health in the bracing air of the Highlands.

This answer was eminently pleasing to Mr. Speezer, and from time to time he renewed the conversation, when the duties of the Admiral permitted, and ended by asking him on board the *Surprise*.

Mr. McCloo being an eminently genial and hospitable person, was greatly delighted at this exchange of courtesies, and presently arose from his seat. Having commanded silence, he called upon his brother Phearshons to drink a toast. Profound silence and expectation followed, and when he announced his pleasure at finding the *Surprise* in the loch the sentiment was received with the greatest enthusiasm. That she had a new owner in the person of their old friend and fellow sportsman Mr. Speezer was a statement that evoked another tumult of applause, and David Thresher discovered that however much his uncle Louison was a recluse to his

relatives he was to the members of the Phearshon Club a rollicking yachtsman. The opinion that the occasion of Mr. Speezer's return to the Holy Loch as owner of the *Surprise* was an occasion for bumpers was loudly echoed. "Bumpers," said McCloo, "bumpers, gentlemen, that the *Surprise* is in such good hands, and bumpers that a rare sportsman, who knows how to handle the tiller, is among us once more. Mr. Speezer, gentlemen, the new owner of the *Surprise*."

The whole company, rising as one man, yelled with delight, roared "He's a jolly good fellow," mounted the table, and, led on by the Secretary, shouted the weird formula of the Highland toast. Then draining their tumblers, tossed the glasses over their heads, and shouted to the steward for new ones to continue the wild orgie.

Then followed another scene, still more extravagant, but all in keeping with the practices of the Club.

"Phearshons," said McCloo, "I observe a defect in our proceedings. The Major is not present. That is a defect we must remedy at all cost. I understand the Major is on board the steam-yacht *Queen of Spades* playing poker, and taking thick uns off a down south American. It is my duty to command the Secretary to select four Phearshons and to proceed with them at once, and bring the Major here, using no more force than is necessary."

This order was loudly applauded, and while it was in course of execution, a member enlivened the company with "Oh, Willie, we have missed you," but the sentiment of the song became gradually disguised in a wild lament, which, in its turn, resolved itself into "Johnny came marching home," as the gig of the *Queen of Spades* was reported in sight.

Soon afterwards the Secretary and his four myrmidons appeared, leading a pitiable object, in the shape of the missing Major in his pyjamas of Zebra pattern. He had been discovered in his bunk, and had been brought rolled up in a blanket. Having swallowed a glass of whiskey, he revived sufficiently to apologise for his absence, and after his second glass he divested himself of his blanket, and danced the sword dance on the table, to the great delight of the company. The occasion was altogether a

memorable one, and stands recorded in the minutes of the Club as unprecedented for the length of the sederunt, and the vivacity of the proceedings.



It was three in the morning before the company broke up, and to such an extent had the good cheer penetrated the heart of Mr. Speezer that nothing would content him, but that his new friend, Mr. Thresher, should sleep on board the *Surprise* that night, instead of going ashore to the hotel.

Whether Mr. Speezer would have done this if he had known that David Thresher knew Mr. Speezer was Mr. Louison, is a matter of extreme doubt.

CHAPTER XXIV

MR. SPEEZER'S CONFIDENCES.

THE obvious advantage of turning in on board the *Surprise* to going ashore at three in the morning to an hotel would have weighed with David Thresher in any case, but the special reasons he had for accepting the owner's invitation gave him no alternative and he was soon stowed away safely in his bunk, with plenty of food for reflection. Circumstances had favoured his project, but it was after all no very extraordinary thing that he should have fallen in with his uncle; seeing that he went in search of him. The singular thing was that he should find himself actually his uncle's guest, or indeed the guest of anyone on so short an acquaintance. Had Mr. Speezer, however, been indeed a stranger he would probably never have offered him hospitality; and for the same reason if the offer had been made, David Thresher's natural reserve would have induced him to decline it. And lying in his bunk, in the perfect stillness of the night, he reflected that he was there to some extent under false pretences. He was taking advantage of knowledge he was not supposed to possess. His uncle was perfectly sure of his ignorance of the identity of his host; and the belief that he was entertaining his nephew as a stranger gave him intense satisfaction. He mentally revelled in the prospect of studying Thresher's character as a casual acquaintance. It was precisely one of those situations that attracted and absorbed the abnormal bent of the Louison mind, and Cheriton afterwards said he had never seen his master so cheerful as on that very night.

Cheriton had become a singular object. He had grown a short and stubbly beard and moustache, and not content with growing them, he had dyed both them and the hair of his head, which had been allowed to grow long, a very dark brown. This change, with his steward's costume, would have been a disguise even to his wife, and would quite have deceived Thresher but for the fact that from the knowledge he had

acquired in London he expected to find him with his master on board the *Surprise*.

The question that puzzled Thresher was his next step. How could he discover to his uncle that he knew him to be Louison and not Speezer? He thought over this a great deal without meeting with any solution. It worried him, and the difficulty, coupled with the lapping of the water on the skin of the boat, and the irregular click of some valve open to the water-line, kept him in a state of nervous wakefulness, when suddenly it occurred to him that it was not at all necessary to disclose the fact, but that, on the contrary, it was advisable he should respect his host's desire for *incognito*, and not only treat him as Mr. Speezer, but refuse to recognise him in any other personality, until he should choose to disclose himself. The thought was comforting, and despite the lapping of the water and the click of the discordant valve, he fell asleep and dreamt of Isabel.

There were not many stirring by nine o'clock next morning on board the yachts at Hunter's Quay, but there was a good deal of strong tea, and brandy and soda, being consumed below. The novelty of the situation, and the fresh air caused David Thresher to rise early, and seeing the *May Bell* was at anchor close by, he sent to the owner, saying he would let him have a cheque for the *Midge* if he could make delivery that morning. It had occurred to Thresher that to retire from the negotiations for the purchase of the little steamer, now that he was the guest of another, would have a touch of meanness about it, and he felt that he would be a more welcome guest if he complimented his host by supplying him with a tender; for, as all the world knows, the perfection of yachting is a well-found schooner waited on by a steam-tender. The answer came that Mr. Buchan would be glad to see Mr. Thresher at one o'clock to lunch.

Mr. Speezer's welcome of David Thresher at breakfast was all that could be desired.

"I've been thinking, my young friend, it's a good thing to have company on a trip like this."

David Thresher nodded, and Cheriton, who was always called "William" on the yacht, gave a start of amazement at this extraordinary declaration on the part of a pronounced recluse.

"I've been sailing now, off and on, for ten years past," added the old gentleman, "but mostly in small yachts chartered for the season. I've bought this one, and if you have no engagements you're welcome for the season."

David Thresher said he was free for a month and was about to complete the purchase of the *Midge*. The pair might run together, and the *Midge* could tow if the *Surprise* were becalmed.

Mr. Speezer thought the scheme excellent and fell to talking of the Clyde waters, and its superiority for sport to the south, and was so full of his past adventures that David Thresher began to have doubts about the identity of his uncle with Mr. Speezer. His extreme cheerfulness, his jovial temper, his animal spirits, and the charm society appeared to have for him, all tended to increase the doubt; but recollection of the acknowledged disappearance from Maida Lodge, and the undoubted information Eales had acquired connected with the purchase of the yacht, brought him to the conclusion that he had much to learn concerning his uncle's mode of life in the past, little dreamt of by him or anyone else but Cheriton, whose amazement, by the way, at this breakfast scene, would most surely have betrayed his master if David Thresher had not determinedly abstained from noticing it.

"That was a remarkable gathering we were at last night," said the old man, and he shook his head with a knowing chuckle. "You'd suppose that none of those fellows had ever had a care or a thought of anything else but pleasure in their lives; but they had among them some of the cleverest men of business in the country—mostly mixed up with iron or shipping—but they were all boys again last night; and they always treat me as one of themselves when I'm down here. Grand air here!"

Cheriton was offering David some fish at this point, and he was so amazed at his master's assurance that he gave a sudden jerk and knocked over the coffee-pot. There was very little in it, but the incident caused the old gentleman to rebuke him with the suggestion that clumsiness so early in the morning was a bad sign. Cheriton retired. The position of affairs was beyond his comprehension.

By a dexterous turn in the conversation Mr. Speezer induced David Thresher to talk of himself.

"Have you travelled much?" he asked.

"No. I have been somewhat peculiarly placed," said Thresher, measuring each word. "I have had the care of my mother up to a few years ago. Latterly I have got entangled in a partnership with a set of rascals, and now I am obliged to keep up communication with my solicitor in London, who has a family matter in hand that may command my attendance at any time."

"Nothing serious, I hope."

"I cannot tell how it may end. It concerns a relative whom I have never seen, and whose desire for seclusion I feel bound to respect; but as I am his nearest relative, I may be called on at any time, in his behalf, and for that reason, I can accept your invitation only on condition that we put in at some port every two or three days."

"To be sure," said Mr. Speezer. "We'll touch land every day; and that you may know my programme, I propose to go south to Holyhead and then as far north as Stornoway."

All this being amicably agreed on, David Thresher went ashore for his baggage, sent a telegram to Eales that he was a guest of Mr. Speezer's on board the *Surprise*, and gave "Post Office, Holyhead," as the next address.

The relationship of the host and guest was now clearly established. What the issue would be was a matter of curiosity to both of them, but it was clear to David Thresher that although he was the better informed he must on no account force his uncle's hand, but continue to treat with Mr. Speezer only.

His next business was to go on board the *May Bell* and conclude the purchase of the *Midge*. He found Mr. Buchan very busy teaching a Scotch terrier to walk on one leg; and his two friends were lying about the deck with that perfection of listlessness which is the envy of active minds and the unattainable medicine for most of the ills of nineteenth century life. There was a third visitor on board, the hero of the blanket of the night before. The Major had, by some mistake, been returned to the wrong boat, at the close of the function, and he had refused to leave the *May Bell* until they had fetched his clothes. In all probability, the episode would

have future development, but what happened was not a matter of concern to anybody in the loch that day, least of all to the Major.

Thresher's object was to conclude his bargain and to return to the *Surprise*, but Mr. Buchan showed a decided objection to discuss business and ordered lunch to be served. It was served accordingly and disposed of, and then, with a supreme effort, the owner of the *Midge* spoke to David Thresher as a buyer. He told his visitor that while three hundred pounds was the price put upon the *Midge*, he understood Mr. Thresher was a man who did not haggle, but paid what he was asked, and therefore the price to him was two hundred and fifty.

An hour afterwards the *Midge* was transferred to the new owner, men and all, and the *Surprise*, with her tender, set sail for the south.

They made Lamlash Bay that night, and the crew turned in with the knowledge that the anchor would be weighed at five in the morning. Mr. Speezer enjoyed the company of his visitor extremely that evening, plied him with numerous questions as to his likes and dislikes and gazed at him through the smoke after dinner with intense satisfaction. Once after a long pause, he said—

“Very quiet here, eh? No callers; no intruders, perfectly safe, eh?”

David Thresher assented, without showing any special appreciation of the fact that he knew what was uppermost in his uncle's mind. He merely said it was pleasant to be away from the world for a time, and then relapsed into more vigorous smoking. The old man next broached the question of reading, said he had quantities of books on board—three unopened packing cases full, besides what was on the shelves, and gave his new found friend the run of them. Said he—

“I have been collecting facts illustrating the distribution of wealth—not the precious metals or capital which is only a measure of accumulated wealth, but the distribution of the means of using the produce of the soil in the shape of food and clothing.”

He paused, and contemplated the smoke as it rose. David Thresher waited, and presently the old man said:

"I've made considerable progress, but I don't see that I can do much good with the facts when I have got them."

Thresher nodded, and waited for more. It was obvious there was more, and he was much interested in the occupation of the old man, so much so that he almost disassociated him from the uncle of mysterious seclusion and regarded him only as Mr. Speezer of recent acquaintance. The old man continued :

"I have been much struck with the fact that while hundreds and thousands of people are daily able to provide themselves with every luxury the world can produce, no matter in how distant part of the world it is produced, yet there are many more thousands who have to labour incessantly to get the coarsest food and the poorest clothing ; and millions beside, still in a state of primitive barbarism. The question that troubles me is, How can this be mended?"

Thresher nodded again.

"You want to know why it troubles me," resumed the old man, with a smile, "and why it should trouble me. I answer, merely because I find—looking on, for I take no part in these matters openly—that the state of matters I have described is used as a handle by demigods to excite the people for no useful purpose. I find the wealthy, who have everything they need, use it to excess and to their injury, and the poor, who have as a rule, the meagre portion too frequently are prodigal in times of plenty, whenever they come ; and I can therefore see no advantage in an indiscriminate levelling, but I am very deeply impressed"—and here the old gentleman became earnest and impressive—"very deeply impressed, with sights I have seen, and which, if you like, I will show you, of whole territories of our own country, filled with a population, not a single man or woman, or child of whom can be said to be either in feature or habit as God designed them to live, and fighting for a bare and squalid subsistence in circumstances that nothing but the brute instinct in man can make preferable to death itself."

The old man resumed his pipe, and both smoked on in silence. The sentiment was quite in accordance with Thresher's own feelings, but he refrained from anything like warm approval for fear he should give ground for a suspicion of servile commendation.

"There should be a remedy," said he.

"There should," said the old man, fiercely, "but there isn't. There is no natural remedy save that which I hope time will bring. We live in houses built of bricks. Have you seen the people making them—the men, women, and the children? They are not human; they are mere animals, and their earnings are despicable. You would be disposed to pay more for your bricks to help them, but if you did the extra pay would not go to the workpeople, nor should you pay more for bricks than people offer them at. If you did this, all commerce would be disarranged, and while it is doubtful whether the workpeople would profit by your generous impulse, the consequence of your action would be either trifling, temporary, and comparatively useless, or positively injurious, because all artificial remedies of social evils are productive of special evils of their own. I know this from experience, because I have tried several processes."

Mr. Speezer said this with determination. Indeed he almost snapped at his guest as if he had contradicted him. After a pause he continued reflecting:

"Yes; I've tried it, tried it in the nail district. I'm trying a new plan now. You shall see in a day or two, and if you can help me, I shall be very glad of your assistance."

David Thresher said he would be very happy to assist as he quite sympathised with Mr. Speezer.

"Then look you here," exclaimed the old man, with a look almost malignant in its intensity. "There's an accursed villain of the name of Cope in Halesowen that I am resolved to ruin, because the scoundrel robs the poor wretches who work for him. It is not that he pays them poor wages, but that he actually cheats them."

David Thresher became enthusiastic at the prospect of bringing Joshua Cope to book, and explained why. He told about his partnership, the action of Crawley Foyle, described the marriage, omitting the tender interest he had in the event, and generally denounced the actions of Cope in language that excited in the mind of the old gentleman the liveliest satisfaction.

The bond of union was complete, and Mr. Speezer almost embraced his guest. For an instant, but only for an instant, he looked at Thresher with an eye that seemed to herald a

confession, but the look faded and the thought that created it resolved itself by a knowing shake of the head, and a self-satisfied smile :

“ We shall be friends, Mr. Thresher—comrades,” said the old man, as they parted for the night. “ I’m glad I have met you.”



CHAPTER XXV

BY SEA AND BY LAND.

SOME assume that it is a happy circumstance in our lives to be denied the knowledge of misfortune after it has become imminent or accomplished ; but it is a nice question whether that ignorance can be said to be blissful, which consists only in an absence of a knowledge of impending danger, or of a misfortune that must sooner or later be faced.

It was a grey fresh morning when the *Surprise* turned out of Lamnish Bay and went before a smart north-wester down the Firth. The schooner was goose-winged as she passed the Holy Isle light, but as soon as she laid her course for the Mull of Galloway a puff came from the Whiting Bay shore and with sheets slightly hauled in and every stitch drawing, her lee rail dipped in the white eddies. The wind backing two or three points was rather in her favour, and as they hauled further off the island they met a slight swell from the southward, which the *Surprise* seemed to recognise as she lifted to each long roller with a sympathetic swing. On the port-bow Ailsa Craig loomed up lonely and severe through the haze of the early morning.

David Thresher was early on deck to taste the caller air, bare-footed and lightly clad. The bracing wind, the speed, and the novelty of the situation were eminently calculated to exhilarate. Life he felt was worth living ; and much of the depression, consequent upon the incidents of the previous few weeks, evaporated, and hope established itself in the form of a possible schooner of the future, with Isabel on board and barriers to perfect happiness obliterated. The sentiment of hopefulness continued throughout the day, and was at its height as they sat at noon in the stern. The heat of the sun was tempered by the bracing wind, and the *Surprise* was still going her best when a strong disposition seized upon Thresher to declare his knowledge of his uncle's identity with his host. Still he could not contrive the mode, and contented himself by reciprocating the cheery manner of the old man and waiting on events.

Events were ripening apace. The placid Mr. Slade was whistling and humming snatches of the popular airs of his youth in Scotland Yard, happy in the belief that he had a surprisingly clear clue. The continued absence and unknown whereabouts of David Thresher was, in his opinion, a profound confirmation of his theories. Slade had a clue but no track, for David Thresher's letters were in accordance with invariable custom in case of his absence carried to Eales, and Eales in accordance with the methods of his profession knew nothing. Eales, however, was at the very moment of David Thresher's most perfect repose writing him a letter that was calculated to rouse him to something approaching madness.

Still he was happy, and happy because he was ignorant. His isolation was complete ; and surely there is something humiliating in the reflection that man in all his pride is ever circumscribed within the area of his touch and vision, and that, being so, he may be lightly employed at the very moment his whole future shall have been blighted by an occurrence of which he must of necessity be ignorant for many days.

The boat sped on all gaiety and brightness, and, acting in accordance with his invariable policy of mystification, Mr. Speezer changed his scheme of the night before, and ordered a straight course for Douglas, Isle of Man. He explained to Thresher that if they landed on the island early in the morning, they could cross to Liverpool by steamer and get to the Halesowen district by the evening, could see what he wished by noon the next day, and return to Holyhead in the evening. He instructed the Skipper accordingly, and the programme so arranged was carried out with such expedition that the two tourists were able to leave Dudley in a four-wheel dog-cart at seven in the morning. Fresh from the moss and heather of the north, the black desolation of the nail country struck Thresher with peculiar force, while the aspect of the people aroused the deepest sympathies of his nature.

"Look at them !" said the old man, "it's very bad."

"Damnable," said the other ; "literally the work of the Fiend."

"Yes ; but it's a good thing to see scenes like this. It steadies one. It's different from Piccadilly and Pall Mall, but it's a part of the life we live, and in closer connection with wealth and luxury than we suppose."

"Ah!" said Thresher, "and where's the Remedy?"

"That's the difficulty. It's not in alms: they would get drunk. It's not in legislation: that would simply force unnatural growth and change the character of the evil. I am about to try the effect of competing with my friend Cope by working at a loss. The process is economically vicious, but it is only an error on my own part—no worse than an error of judgment, and the workpeople all about here will be better off without knowing that the cause of their improvement is based upon unsound political economy."

The old man laughed as he said this, and Thresher said:

"And it amuses you."

"Yes, it amuses me, and it does more. I'll make a confession; I'm in the humour to make confessions, my friend." Here he slapped Thresher on the back in good nautical style as he faced round and said, "look you, my friend. I shall annoy Cope by doing this. It'll irritate him, worry him, make him mad. Ha! ha! That also is economically unsound, but what does it matter if it amuses me and benefits the people? Cope's a ruffian, my friend. He's doing wrong. Why, it's dramatic justice."

The old man laughed aloud as they walked along the dreary road with the blackened stones and the coal dust path and the blighted tree stumps. Laughter other than drunken outbursts was never heard on that fearful plain. Humour was exotic to the nail district.

"You agree with me—you approve, my friend?" enquired the old man.

"Oh, yes. It seems to me," said Thresher, "that nature will settle the question of itself without any artificial intervention."

"How?"

"By killing the whole lot off."

"No; there you're wrong. They are all thin and miserable, but the strength of those who survive childhood is enormous—phenomenal. They're all bone and sinew. They haven't a scrap of unnecessary flesh on them—no fatty degeneracy of the heart here, my friend, and the population is increasing. The way nature works is to push out the surplus and fill the larger towns, but that also is a harsh remedy."

"It's a sorry business altogether," said Thresher, "and a nice chapter for the philosophers who discuss the question as to whether life's worth living."



As Thresher said this they turned a corner, and came upon Ebenezer Warp, bent and weird, with his apron wound round his waist, and his eyes sternly bent before him. He peered up at the faces of the strangers as he passed them with an earnest appealing look, and went off muttering and wailing. They passed many others as wretched as he—many sullen and brutal of aspect, and all alike desperate. The social

problem was abundant of examples, but as hopeless of solution as the misery was deep. As Thresher passed along he came to the conclusion that he was a very poor specimen of a philanthropist in the face of an evil so stupendous, and he readily found excuse for retreating from the contemplation of so much human suffering in the necessity of "catching the train."



Thresher on the return journey remarked that his uncle took tickets for Bangor and not for Holyhead. He suggested a possible error.

"Quite right, my friend; quite right. I'll make another confession. I never tell my captain where he will find me when I leave him, because then he cannot tell anyone else. I tell him to call at the Post Office. You didn't observe that I posted a letter immediately I landed at Douglas. That was directed to Holyhead, and instructed the Captain to be at Bangor this evening, and have a boat at a certain pier he knows of at ten to-night. That's my way."

The old man winked cheerily and seemed very well satisfied with himself. Thresher merely smiled and bowed. Perhaps if he had known less he would have said more, but his knowledge of Mr. Speezer's identity embarrassed him.

The old gentleman increased in cheerfulness during the journey, and once when they were alone in the carriage he put his hand upon Thresher's knee, and said with a kindly accent that showed more feeling than the circumstances should in an ordinary case have warranted :

"Allow me, Mr. Thresher, to say that I'm very glad you have accepted my invitation. Your company has much cheered me."

Thresher was about to say the obligation was on his side, but he was stopped in the middle of his remark by the old man, who exclaimed :

"No, no, my friend, I know what you would say ; but believe me, the obligation is with me. I am pleased—delighted. I have led a retired life, and the loneliness was beginning to pall upon me—in fact, it was becoming serious. I have met a good many men in my yachting experiences, but they have not given me pleasure. You do. I sincerely hope we shall know more of each other. Yes," he added wistfully, "more of each other."

This statement was, as may be supposed, peculiarly embarrassing to Thresher, who was again tempted to make a declaration on his part, but again he resisted, and said :

"I am complimented, Sir, by your statement ; but I will not say more than that I reciprocate your hopes."

"All right. Let's say no more now ; let's say no more. I'm glad you like my work at Halesowen, and if you'll assist me with your advice and occasional oversight, I shall be much obliged." And again he slapped Thresher on the knee with a cheery look of confidence.

There was nothing more of interest said during the journey, except when Thresher asked, with some show of anxiety, whether Mr. Speezer was sure the letters would be fetched from Holyhead.

"Oh, yes ; certain. You may trust William. William never fails, my friend. If our letters are not now in the cabin of the *Surprise*, something very serious has happened. William, my friend, may be trusted, never doubt that."

This eulogium was justified by the event. The *Midge* was at the landing place on their arrival, and the schooner was lying out in the seaway with sails slack and ready for a start, for it was also part of Mr. Speezer's custom never to remain

at anchor where he joined the boat. No matter what the hour, he always weighed up and sailed to the next convenient anchorage—the less frequented the better. On this occasion, the wind being light, the *Midge* showed her usefulness, and towed the schooner to a well sheltered nook at the Carmarthen end of the straits.

The letters were there, and one of them was from Eales; but Thresher having achieved the object of his quest was not in any undue haste to read it. Eales's letters had ceased to be matters of absorbing interest. He changed his jacket and shoes, had a wash, and then prepared to read his letter in the saloon as he waited for some grilled bones and the company of his cheery host. His complacency deserted him as soon as he had read a dozen lines; and before he had finished he was in a whirlpool of thought.

The letter was as follows:—

“My dear Thresher,—I am under the necessity of reporting what cannot fail to be disagreeable. If it does not alarm you, it will at least cause you the deepest concern, to hear that you are actually accused of murder, and that men are watching your house in expectation of your return, with intent, I suppose, to apprehend you. You are accused of causing the death, by poison, of Mary Joiner, and a Mrs. Shilton, both in the service of Miss Winscomb, at Brighton; and the evidence in support of the charge is, according to the police and the press, conclusive against you. Inasmuch as the police and the press are usually wrong, the situation is less disturbing than it otherwise would be; but it is well I should give you some statement of the grounds of the accusation in case you should not have seen the papers. In the first place, it is asserted on the basis of medical analysis that these two women died of a poison of the nature of prussic acid, and that a poison of this character was found inserted in an egg in the pantry of the house. These points seem well ascertained, but it is remarkable that you should be charged with having put those eggs into the pantry in the place of others that you are supposed to have removed and carried away. It is alleged that you burglariously entered the house on the night before the death of Mary Joiner and exchanged these eggs, not with intent to poison Mary Joiner, but to procure the death either of Miss Winscomb or

Mrs. Cope, both of whom lived in the house. Your motive is alleged to be in the case of Miss Winscomb a desire to remove her in the hope that your uncle, Mr. Louison, may the more surely inherit the accumulations of the Tontine, and in the case of Mrs. Cope revenge on account of her having married one other than yourself. In support of these assertions it is stated that you were seen issuing from the house between two and three in the morning of the day on which Mary Joiner was poisoned; and in further confirmation it is pointed out that you have since absented yourself from your dwelling, and your whereabouts is unknown.

"This is the substance of what has been published on the matter, and the fact that it is published induces me to advise you that some notice be taken of it; and especially that you should declare yourself. The necessity for so doing must be apparent to you; but pending your authority I can make no statement as to your whereabouts or the cause of your absence; and I therefore await your instructions with some anxiety

"Yours, very truly,

"JOSEPH EALES."

"P.S.—The police have been here enquiring for your address. They have plied my clerks, and are no doubt watching our letter boy. I therefore intend to post this myself when I am sure of not being observed."



This postscript formed a startling commentary on the situation. It exhibited the necessity for caution; it showed him the belief was current that he was hiding, and the incident enraged him.

He read the letter a second time, and was obliged to confess to himself that on all points he was much disturbed by it. The fact of his presence in the house at Brighton on the night in question, the cause of his being there, the fact that he had been observed, and the consequences

that would ensue if the incident were openly canvassed were matters for serious alarm. That Eales treated the case lightly was natural, seeing he was unacquainted with the one fact that made it serious.

Mr. Speezer entered the saloon rubbing his hands and smiling in anticipation of a cheery evening, when he was staggered by the excitement depicted on his friend's face. He stopped short in an attitude of enquiry.

"I've had a disagreeable communication," responded Thresher. "You, sir, have been so good as to extend to me your hospitality, and I feel it to be impossible to delay a single moment in showing to you the cause of my anxiety."

With this he handed the old man the open letter, and waited with an expression of deep concern on his face. Much to his surprise, Mr. Speezer folded it up and stuck it between a couple of books behind him, as he said :

"We'll discuss this after supper, my friend."

"But," said Thresher, with hesitation, "I'm doubtful whether I should take supper in the circumstances."

"What?" exclaimed the old man, "Not take supper after such a day as we have had. I don't wish to dictate, but I decline to discuss anything until I have eaten my supper, and I invite you, my young friend, to follow my example."

Cheriton at this moment entered with a dish of boiled flounders, preparatory to the grilled bones, and David Thresher took his seat.

"Ah! that's better," exclaimed Mr. Speezer. "Have you had fine weather, William?"

"Yes, sir."

"No accidents?"

"No, sir."

"That's good," said the old man, and then he caught sight of the settled gloom on Thresher's face, and he began to have a decided curiosity to know what was in the letter. He, however, kept bravely on with persistent cheerfulness till he came to the last item of the supper, and when Cheriton had set down a prime dish of soft roes on toast, he looked up to see whether the sight of them had any effect upon Thresher. He was surprised to remark only the faintest glimmer of interest,

and then he knew the letter was serious indeed. He shook his head, thought a minute, and then said :

“Now, I think we can venture to look at this letter.”

“I hope you won’t repent not having read it before,” said Thresher.

On this the old man put the letter down, ate his savory, drank a little whiskey and water and then, rising up, held the letter in his hand as he said :

“My dear friend, I’m not going to allow this letter to disturb me, no matter what its contents,” and he shook the letter as if he bore it animosity. He then settled himself to read it, and when he had finished he said with solemn deliberation :

“Well, I never in the whole of my experience came upon such an extraordinary combination—most extraordinary ! Let me read it again ;” and with this he settled himself in an arm-chair, and read the letter with a whimsical expression of calm amusement overspreading his countenance.

“Ah,” he exclaimed, “they’re dropping the anchor. I must go on deck, and see where we are.”

And away he went, throwing the letter on the table as if it had been of no more consequence than a washing-bill.

The cool indifference of the old man somewhat revived Thresher, who took up the letter mechanically, as if to read it again, but he paraded the saloon instead.

Presently the old man returned, and in a light and cheerful manner said it was a very fine night, and that they had got a very good anchorage ; ordered Cheriton to clear the table and put on the whiskey, made believe he had forgotten all about the letter, and generally behaved in an eccentric manner. David Thresher’s amazement at his uncle’s behaviour was a corrective to his nervousness, and he was decidedly cooler when the old man said :

“Now, let’s have a talk about this very curious letter.”

Saying this, he sat down, mixed more whiskey and water, insisted on Thresher doing the same as he passed the decanter, and proceeded with a light and almost frivolous air, to say :

“I know of your friend Eales. He’s a very nice fellow, isn’t he ?”

“Very trustworthy,” said Thresher.

"And you know I know of Cope. He's a scoundrel."

"Yes," said Thresher.

"But I know Miss Winscomb also, although I have not seen her for nearly fifty years. Fifty years," he repeated with a touch of sentiment. He recalled a tall, dashing girl in a riding habit and wearing a hat and feathers. Then, after a pause, he asked :

"Who are these two women you are supposed to have poisoned, eh?"

Thresher looked askance at the old man, and, finding him serious, said he had never heard of them.

"Then what about Mr. Louison?" asked Mr. Speezer.

"He's my uncle, but I have never seen him."

"Then what do you think is the meaning of this matter?"

"As I am enjoying your hospitality, sir," said Thresher, with dignity, "you are entitled to ask, and I am desirous of answering. I can make nothing of it, but I feel it incumbent on me to telegraph to the police and say I am coming to Scotland Yard as soon as possible."

"Oh, no, don't do that. You're quite safe here. We'll manage better than that. Let's consider. You say you have never seen your uncle. Is that so?"

"I have never had any communication with him in any way. He was desirous of seclusion, and, although I am his nearest relative, I thought it proper to respect his wishes."

"Oh," said the old man. "Then I'll tell you something. You have seen him, and know him well."

Thresher turned half round to look at the old man, and put on a smile of incredulity. The old man laughed and nodded, but Thresher merely said :

"Perhaps you'll tell me when and where."

"Here! Now, my boy!" and the old man rose up, and took Thresher by the hand, as he exclaimed, "I'm your uncle Louison; but only when I'm at home. I'm Speezer abroad, and nobody else. And I tell you what, my boy. You've won my heart. We shall be friends, shipmates, comrades; and as you are accused in this matter somewhat on account of me, I'll stand by you, and get you out of the mess; but you must tell me as much as you can of the whole matter, and we must settle the campaign at once."

It was difficult for Thresher to reply to this speech. It was impossible for him to disclose his previous knowledge, and he shrunk from the imposture of pretending surprise. He merely grasped his uncle's hand, and said :

"I'm very glad to hear it. I was amazed the other day to hear you had been kidnapped, and although I had never met you, I was concerned at the knowledge that nothing could be heard of you!"

The old man laughed heartily, and said :

"Then let us take an example from the fact, and not be in a hurry to send word to Scotland Yard. The first thing you have to do is to see Eales, and I'll manage that for you in London without any chance of your being seen, and you shall be on the water next day safe from pursuit, if you like."

"I would prefer to go straight to the police," said Thresher ; "but as matters stand, I'll be guided by you."

"You'll not repent it ; but in the meantime we must act."

With this he touched the hand-bell, and Cheriton appeared with all his old alertness, but with less of the terrier aspect about him now that he was standing behind a beard of the wrong colour. Mr. Speezer asked for note-paper, and when it was produced he requested Cheriton to write a letter as follows :—

Post Office, Milford.

Sir,—Please to send me at the above address information whether Maida Lodge is still watched, and if so, where the men are placed. You may expect another communication from me the day after I get your answer.

Yours obediently,

To J Eales, Esq.

WILLIAM CHERITON.

"Now, William," said the old man, "that letter must be posted to-night somewhere."

Cheriton nodded.

"And further, William, Mr. Thresher is my nephew. He knows me, but it is understood I am still Mr. Speezer so far as the world is concerned."

Cheriton nodded again, but there was a twinkle in his eye, as if he were glad to have a companion in the secrets of Maida Lodge.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONVENTIONAL GRIEF AND REAL MALICE.

ISABEL's concern for David Thresher would have been extreme but from the fact that she had to face another misfortune more definite and not less calculated to excite her sympathy. The journey she and her mother took in haste from Brighton, fleeing as from a plague, resulted in an attack of cold that laid her mother prostrate; and at the very time the allegation against David Thresher assumed shape, Mrs. Foyle died of inflammation of the lungs. Isabel's anxiety, tending her mother, in her mother's house, and with the intensity of her nature wholly absorbed in her work, to the exclusion of all other matters under the sun, caused her to disregard popular rumour and newspaper reports; and from varied motives it became the object of those about her to conceal rather than communicate the circumstances associated with the Brighton incident. Her father dared not mention the name of David Thresher to her; and Lady Arabella, who was now a regular occupant of Mr. Foyle's house, to keep dear Mrs. Cope company in her distress, had reasons of her own, of no very distinct character, however, for not exciting a sympathy that might become inconveniently pronounced.

And the poor weak mother died in the arms of her strong, defiant daughter, passing almost imperceptibly to the rest she had hungered for during many years. And as she passed away, just lifting her arms a very little as if she would have embraced her one friend, and then closing her eyes for ever, Isabel knew that her work of tender watchfulness was over, that her place in the family circle was gone, and that if in her future life she should know aught of tenderness, it would come of hopes as yet undeveloped, and perhaps, impossible.

She was much impressed, inevitably so, but she did not weep; she did not shed a single tear. The spirit of her past life left her with one long drawn sigh, and then a deep-set frown fell upon her face, and she braced herself in anger, because she felt her mother's life had been wasted for her, and

all the world—literally strangled by hypocritical neglect and brutal selfishness.

As for Mr. Crawley Foyle, member for Buckton, and financier, philanthropist, and champion of oppressed nationalities, he behaved as a model husband. He wept copiously, apostrophised the household's friends, whenever he could find opportunity, on the virtues of his poor dear Clara, claimed the compassion of the world in general for his irreparable loss, and said he looked forward to a dread and dreary future, deprived of the companionship of the most amiable creature that ever breathed the breath of life. But careful observers remarked that Mr. Crawley Foyle continued to be blessed with a good appetite, and he took special care never to be left alone with his daughter.



As became an affectionate husband who was also a member of Parliament, Mr. Crawley Foyle had recourse to plumes and velvet horsecloths to indicate to the world at large the measure of his grief ; and although he was by no means clear whom to put in them, he felt that two mourning coaches, were an absolute necessity. He had few relatives and no friends, and the question of complying with conventional custom in the matter of mourners became to Mr. Crawley Foyle, M.P., a matter of difficulty. He and Arthur made two ; it suited the purpose of Joshua Cope to be a third, and it suited the purpose of Mr. Foyle that Captain Joybell should be a fourth, although he had not the remotest connection with anyone concerned. Belief in the urgent need of using a second coach resulted in an invitation to Milton, the book-keeper of Schrieber & Co., couched in language that amounted to an order and coupled with a request that he should return to the City as soon after the funeral as possible. Crawley Foyle's lamentations over the dead were modified by a keen appreciation of the necessities of the living, and a profound conviction that his own necessities were great indeed.

Joshua Cope had been somewhat troublesome of late. He had been applying mercantile blisters to the house of

Schrieber & Co., and his partners, father and son, had not been happy under the treatment. Mr. Foyle, senior, was suffering from an acute attack of impecuniosity, and Mr. Foyle, junior, having met with the usual reverse of those who are successful in corners, had been having recourse to those desperate remedies, which in his case, resulted in sleepless nights, and abnormal filial attention. Both father and son were, therefore, particularly desirous of company. Neither wished to be left alone with the other; and, whatever they differed upon, they were unanimous in the desire to avoid a business conversation with Cope. This state of things, coupled with the fear of being alone with his daughter, had caused Mr. Foyle to insist upon Captain Joybell returning with him to lunch. Nothing, in the estimation of Mr. Crawley Foyle, was so efficient a bar to disagreeable family discussion as the presence of a comparative stranger. The surpassing vanity of Captain Joybell, however, had, after mature reflection on his part, shown him, conclusively, that appreciation of his commercial genius alone prompted the invitation, and he returned to Eaton Square in a frame of mind approaching the hilarious.

Diversified as were the circumstances, they all contributed to repress conversation. Only two persons present had complete control of themselves, and Lady Arabella, who was one of them, was silent of set purpose. The other, Joshua Cope, who saw his wife for the first time since he had left for Halesowen, was waiting his opportunity. It came near the end of the lunch, and Mr. Crawley Foyle, who had sought safety in distance from his partner, was made the passive instrument of his malice.

"I think, Foyle," said Cope, in cold, snappish tones, "we may congratulate ourselves in being rid of Thresher now, eh?"

"Oh, yes, certainly, of course," answered Foyle, with a nervous glance at Isabel, who listened unmoved.

"It'd be a nice thing for Schrieber & Co. to be mixed up with a murderer, eh?" cried Cope; "a nice thing!"

Isabel started. This was news to her, and she could not restrain a sharp look of anger and curiosity at her titular husband. Her father, noticing her with alarm, exclaimed:

"My friend, remember Captain Joybell is his relation."

"Relation," sneered Cope, "I shouldn't suppose he'll admit the relationship when the upstart swings."

Captain Joybell felt bound to make himself agreeable to the embodiment of capital, and, with ineffable contempt, flung a few epithets across the table for his hearers to apply as they pleased :

"Dirt, scum, outcast!" exclaimed the captain, loftily, but no sooner were the words out of his mouth than his complacent smile left him, and he quailed before Isabel, who now sufficiently comprehended the situation to be aroused. With more heat than judgment she asked :

"Have you now exhausted your malice, you two gentlemen?"

"My dear! my dear!" apostrophised Mr. Crawley Foyle, "think of the occasion."

"Have these gentlemen thought of the occasion? Have you thought of it?" she asked.

"My dear! my dear!" exclaimed her father in an agony of fear, "this is unseemly."

"Unseemly!" she retorted. "Cannot your hypocrisy give place for a single day to repentance? Are you still the fawning slave of this wretched man you call my husband?"

Mr. Crawley Foyle became pallid and speechless. He never had been equal to the braving of the scorn of his daughter, and, without knowing why, he felt a torrent had been let loose which threatened to overwhelm him. Cope came to his rescue.

"Do you usually defend criminals with such warmth, Mrs. Cope?" he asked, with special emphasis on the name.

"Silence, sir," she retorted. "You at least know he is innocent of participation in that business."

"The police don't think so," sneered Cope, who was beginning to lose his temper.

"Then you can instruct them," she answered—again with more zeal than discretion.

Cope's suspicion of her knowledge was aroused. He cast one quick malignant look at her, and then attacked a banana with unusual ferocity. With the last mouthful he had arrived at the conclusion that love of Thresher and chagrin had originated the remark, not knowledge of facts, and he felt more at ease.

There was really nothing in her retort which might not have been prompted by esteem of the man Cope maligned, and it was presumable she should expect all her friends to believe in the honour and freedom from reproach of one whom she regarded with tenderness; but consoling as this conclusion was on the main point it was desperately irritating in another respect; it was hardly to be expected that Joshua Cope could regard Isabel's championship of his rival with equanimity, and as his fears were dispelled malignity revived.

Cope was assisted in his reflections by the silence of his friends. It lasted only for a moment or two, but the irksomeness of the pause bore heavily on the soul of Mr. Foyle, who, by a supreme mental effort, pushed on one side all that had gone before, and said, in the mildest and most complacent tones:

"My dear, you'll excuse me, I'm sure, but I really must see Mr. Ware this afternoon, though I shan't be long."

With this he rose and walked to the door with the solemnity fitting the occasion. What was more natural, although he had begged them not to disturb themselves, than that his son should resolve "to follow the governor's example" or that Captain Joybell's discretion should incite him to a similar course.

The ladies next rose, and it was then that Cope, who had remained inactive, executed a strategic movement based upon a sudden accession of artificial politeness. He managed by a dexterous pretence of opening the door for his wife to procure precedence for Lady Arabella, and then with a pronounced accession of rudeness, shut the door, and standing with his back to it, hissed at Isabel:

"What did you mean when you said I could instruct the police about Thresher?"

"Stand aside, sir," was the answer. "How dare you?"

He remained at bay, glaring at her. It was in the balance which of the two would give way, but temper got the better of Joshua Cope, to whom the irksomeness of his position became more exasperating day by day.

"You are in league with him," said he fiercely, "in league against me."

"Stand aside," said Isabel, with increased emphasis.

Joshua Cope did not move, but Lady Arabella had remained outside waiting in expectation that her interference would be needed. At this point she pushed open the door.

"Call Mr. Foyle," said Isabel, as Lady Arabella appeared. "Tell him to come here, immediately. Tell them all to come."

As Foyle was at that time in the act of escaping from the house, followed by his two satellites, Lady Arabella's task was an easy one, and before Joshua Cope could determine what to do next, they were in the room. Prudence suggested that he should retreat, but vindictiveness restrained him. He still glared at Isabel.



"Look at him," said she, falling back a step as she pointed to that hideous spectacle, a man convulsed with passion—foiled, and without resource. "He stands in my way," she added. "Remove him, and let me pass."

"My dear, you should remember," expostulated Mr. Foyle, with delightful vagueness.

"Remember what?" she asked. "The miserable trick you played upon me to induce me to marry this wretched man? I shall not easily forget it," she continued, with withering contempt.

“My dear, my dear,” exclaimed Foyle, “this is not a day for recrimination. Think of your mother.”

“I do think of her. Thank God I have no longer to protect her from your insolent selfishness. I live for the living, not for the dead ; and I again command you to put that man aside to let me pass.”

“Did you hear her ?” said Cope. “She’s going to Thresher, she confesses it ; but she daren’t.”

“Let me pass, I say,” and she waived him aside. “I dare do as I please and as honour commands.”

She stopped in the doorway, and turning upon him with exceeding bitterness, she declaimed :

“Your malignity shall not prevent me assisting any friend of mine, if it comes within my power. If David Thresher should need my help, and I knew where he was, he should have my help. I never knew till now, and I say it before all these, how deeply I had loved him ; how bitter my hatred is of you !”



CHAPTER XXVII.

PARASITES AT WORK.

THE private enquiry agent is an abnormal growth of modern civilization: the creation of conventional laws, the instrument of suspicion, and the parasite of jealousy. The fact that Joshua Cope had recourse to this refuge for social failures indicates the condition to which he was reduced, but it is no exaggeration to say that he regarded the expedient as nothing less than a panacea.

He went to Chudleigh & Co., and found Chudleigh at home. He did not find him at home easily. There was a good deal of mystery about Chudleigh. There were four bells at his office door and four names, but the name "Chudleigh" was at the top. Unlike the custom at most offices, a visitor was admitted only on ringing; and upon entering he would find himself in



the presence of three or four extremely dejected members of the human race who seemed very much washed as regards

their faces and very much unwashed as regards their garments. There is nothing so suggestive of penury as a man in faded clothes with a bleached face and boots polished with black lead. Why Chudleigh had such men sitting in his waiting-room was one of the many mysteries of his official life, but the initiated knew them to be watchers. They were precisely of the type of men who hang about street corners, and, therefore, they were able to watch without exciting suspicion of their purpose.

Chudleigh himself was a smart man. Young, active, excitable and eager; apparently always in the act of pouncing upon some one, or at least on the look out for someone to pounce upon, he impressed his clients with the idea that revenge was actually within their grasp the very moment they entered his presence. Red hair, a red moustache, a velvet waistcoat, and white gaiters were the striking features of his personal appearance, with patent leather boots and a blue tie. His intimate friends, who liked his dash, admired his figure, and tried to imitate the inimitable fit of his coat, had misgivings about the waistcoat. That and the blue tie indicated a defect in the psychology of Chudleigh. If Chudleigh had not been capable of velvet waistcoats and blue ties in combination, he could never have been an enquiry agent. The two conditions were complementary, and in this respect Chudleigh was artistically perfect, but it was bad art.

Joshua Cope, rogue as he was, felt ashamed as he entered Chudleigh's office. Filled with black malignity, and spurred by impetuous hate, he selected Chudleigh with his habitual care, and set out to approach him with the eagerness of relentless spite. But when he saw Chudleigh—when he was face to face with a human being who was to become his father confessor, he quailed. He did not bate one jot of his purpose: his malignity was unallayed, but the nervous movement of Chudleigh, the keenness of his eye, the dash of slyness that destroyed all hope of genuineness in the man, and the undisguised eagerness with which he welcomed a new comer whose misfortune was his gain, reminded Joshua Cope of the method of a ferret. He was accordingly nervous about coming to close quarters. Instinct told him he might have too much of

Chudleigh, but malignity overcame this spasm of caution, and said he :

“ You watch people ? ”

“ Oh, yes. Whom do you want watched ? ”

“ My wife.”

“ Yes, certainly. Will you oblige me with a few particulars, name and so forth ? ”

Cope did this, and then came an awkward pause.

“ I expect this is a serious case, eh ? ” said Chudleigh in a manner that was intended to be sympathetic, but was really impertinent.

“ Why do you expect that ? ” asked Cope, with asperity.



“ It looks like it,” said Chudleigh, with a shake of the head.

“ Why does it look like it ? ”

“ From the facts.”

“ What facts ? ”

“ Mrs. Cope is not unknown,” said Chudleigh, with a mysterious air.

Mr. Cope grunted, and Chudleigh was encouraged.

“ Do you want me to proceed blindly ? ” he asked, “ to report in the dark only what we see, or do you wish me to proceed with knowledge and report with intelligence ? ”

“ I want your assistance,” said Cope, with a touch of irritation.

"Precisely : then give me some of your facts. Who is suspected ?" asked Chudleigh, fixing his victim with his eye.

Cope literally writhed, then pulled himself together with an effort, and without a blush, said :

"No one."

Chudleigh bowed, said it was singular, and added he would probably be able to let Mr. Cope know whom to suspect on the morrow.

Chudleigh made a mental reflection that all his "clients," as he called them, were alike. He doubted whether half of them could define their suspicions to themselves, and as to communicating them to the man who was to assist them, not one in a hundred ever thought of doing anything else than conceal and confuse him. Chudleigh surmised they thought it clever. It was understood, therefore, that Joshua Cope suspected no one, and merely wanted his wife watched day and night for the humour of the thing. Having got over this difficult point, Chudleigh reverted to business and asked when the reports were desired. It was ultimately determined to have them made out each day up to five in the afternoon, to be delivered at the house in Park Lane by a special messenger, who was to call himself "Smith," and to hand the report to Mr. Cope in person. As the house was to be watched day and night, Chudleigh's fee was to be two guineas a day, and travelling expenses.

Joshua Cope was not absolutely certain he had not done a foolish thing in putting his domestic affairs into such hands, but solacing himself with the reflection that he could call a halt at any time, he experienced that sort of relief which comes of smashing crockery in a fit of temper : his feelings were relieved by action.

Chudleigh, however, was delighted. He saw a long vista of guineas opening up before him, and he became more delighted as the day advanced, for in a very short time he had made discoveries.

Chudleigh had a partner named Marks, who carried on business in another street as if it were a totally distinct concern. The advantages of this were numerous, and every care was taken to keep the fact of the partnership to themselves. They never visited each other's office on any pretext whatever ;

and if they communicated, the correspondence was carried on by means of a mongrel cypher. Their domestic partnership, however, was closer. They lived in the same house, and though they had two suites of apartments, they invariably dined together, and their evening conferences formed the most important transactions of the day.

Marks was a contrast to Chudleigh. He was older and larger, and dressed always in black; he was a sombre man. He had a large nose set upon a large puffy face, short black hair, a bull neck, and small dark eyes that never opened wide. He was formerly a solicitor, but had been struck off the rolls; and it might have been worse for him had it not been for the timely disappearance of a witness whose relations with Chudleigh have always been surmised but never proved. Marks, as if desirous of corroborating the suggestion, served Chudleigh with the faithfulness of a dog. To all the world beside he was a bitter enemy, and he took a positive delight in the pursuit of others and the aggravation of their perplexities. He did not succeed in inspiring his clients with the unbounded confidence that Chudleigh's manner imposed, but he was more persistent and more sure. The industry of the mole and the impetuosity of the ferret, formed a good burrowing combination and the partnership prospered.

Marks being slower was more punctual than Chudleigh, and was awaiting his arrival in their Chambers on the day Joshua Cope had given his instructions. The Chambers consisted of an upper floor of a mansion in Bloomsbury Square that had seen better days. The furniture was second-hand and discordant in form and colour, but the partners had not at this time amassed a sufficient fortune to induce a quest for luxury, and it was not within their nature to conceive of an artistic home.

Marks was sitting at an office table writing in a large folio when Chudleigh entered. It was his custom to keep a duplicate of the cases of both establishments at home, with an index and references. He spent many hours over this work at night collating facts and constructing methods of action. It was in this way that the value of the partnership and especially the co-operation of the two establishments was exhibited.

"Much business, old man?" asked Chudleigh.

"Three new cases," was the reply in dull, monotonous tones.

Such an accession of business was remarkable ; but prosperity did not elate Marks.

"What are they?" asked Chudleigh.

"A Mrs. Pilter has been receiving anonymous letters, and wants to know who sent them, but she doesn't seem inclined to pay for the trouble, and she will not be a lasting case. A man named Bowdler wants his partner's movements reported, and I hope to make something good of this. A lawyer named Eales wants a house in Mayfair watched to see whether any one else is watching it; and generally to report what occurs on all points. A good case."

"All right, old man," said Chudleigh, lighting a cigarette. "I've one case. It's only one, but I think it's a good one. Strong passion, my boy. Joshua Cope, rich as Cræsus, wants his wife tracked."

Chudleigh gave the particulars, and the unimpassioned Marks entered them. When he had finished, he said in the same dull matter of course tone:

"I can make your first report for you. The lady went to Maida Lodge yesterday afternoon."

"The devil she did. That's good. How do you make it out?"

"Well, you see," said Marks, "that's the house my client Eales the solicitor wants watched; we had a man on at eleven o'clock."

"That's all right," said Chudleigh, waving his cigarette in the air.

"Here's our memorandum," said Marks, turning over his ledger of social peccadilloes, and then he read:

"Maida Lodge, the house of Walter Louison, watched by Scotland Yard for two reasons. Louison is said to have been kidnapped, but Scotland Yard doesn't believe it, and watched the house for a week to see him return. Scotland Yard now watches it to see whether David Thresher, Louison's nephew, and suspected of being implicated in the Brighton poisoning case, goes to the house. Motive: Thresher is next-of-kin and probable heir of Louison, who would benefit by the death of Miss Winscomb, whom it is supposed he wanted to make away with."

"What's that to do with Mrs. Cope?" asked Chudleigh, smoking pleasantly on the hearthrug.

"Nothing," was the answer, "but that's Scotland Yard, not me. My note is that a lady in deep mourning called this afternoon, spoke to the housekeeper, who opened the door, and was tracked home to Park Lane, where Mr. and Mrs. Joshua Cope live. House taken furnished."

"How does that connect up?"

"It doesn't connect, but there's no doubt it will very soon. What does Cope want? Whom and what does he suspect?"

"He says he suspects no one—the usual lie—the customary pretence—the common difficulty the British public puts in our way when the British public wants us to help them."

Chudleigh delivered this sentiment with appropriate scorn, and waved the smoke around as if to signify his vast power and superiority.

"We shall know more to-morrow," said Marks.

"Yes, but we should do something to-night. You see Cope's mad with rage, and he's bound to go the whole hog, and it is advisable to impress him. Now it's only four hours since I had instructions, and if I were to send in a report giving facts likely to rouse him up and make him mad, I fancy he would be impressed with Chudleigh & Co., eh? Think it out, Marks."

Marks took a long look at his partner, a covert and sinister look as if the authoritative tone were displeasing, and then said, "Yes," mechanically. After a moment he added: "I'll draught a report;" and he set to work.

The report was not long, but it was very much to the point, and was as follows—

"Report by Chudleigh & Co. on case 68,974:—

"Our representatives have brought us information to the effect that a lady dressed in deep mourning visited the house of Mr. Louison, Maida Lodge, Mayfair, yesterday afternoon, twenty-four hours before the case was put into our hands, and that said lady was followed to the house of Mr. Cope in Park Lane. It is assumed the lady was Mrs. Cope.

"Mr. Louison is the uncle of David Thresher who is wanted by the police on a charge of poisoning. Enquiries lead to the assumption that the lady in mourning enquired

at Maida Lodge in the hope of procuring information concerning the said David Thresher."

"Ah!" said Chudleigh, as he read it, "that'll fetch him; that'll make business. We must send this off at once."

Chudleigh rang the bell and tossed the report to Marks, who put it in an envelope and addressed it, while Chudleigh remained standing on the hearthrug smoking and admiring his boots.

The bell was answered by Slammer, who being the husband of Mrs. Slammer, the housekeeper, discharged the duties of butler, valet, and manager, to Messrs. Chudleigh & Marks, and took a special pride in being in their confidence. He called them his "gentlemen," and assumed a mysterious air whenever they were referred to by others. He was especially severe in his manner when any messenger from either of the establishments called, and had given much earnest thought upon the question as to what would happen if a messenger from each office arrived at the same moment. No such catastrophe had ever yet occurred, but the possibility of its occurrence kept Slammer in a state of chronic excitement after five in the evening.

Slammer was a stout man, all round and plump, and looked much shorter than he was by reason of his plumpness. He usually wore a loose fitting jacket that made him look stouter than he actually was, so what with his roundness and plumpness and his short loose jacket, he seemed to be as broad as he was long. When spoken to, Slammer always stood at attention, and answered with his head in the air.

"Slammer," said Mr. Chudleigh, "your name's 'Smith.'"

"Yes, sir."

"You're to go at once to this address and ask to see Mr. Cope. You're to give the name of 'Smith,' and when you are quite sure you have got Mr. Cope alone give him this letter, which you'll keep in your pocket till you do get him alone."

"Yes, sir. What's Mr. Cope like?"

"A little hard-headed old man, with an eye like a gimlet and a scar on his left forehead."

"Right, sir," and Slammer went on his errand.

"What did you say in your report to Eales the lawyer," asked Chudleigh.

"Much the same thing," said Marks, with just a glimmer of a twinkle in his half-closed eyes. "I believe he's interested in Thresher."

"I say," exclaimed Chudleigh with much eagerness, "suppose that wasn't Mrs. Cope. What then?"

"But it was," said Marks quietly. "We put Dolly Mullins on and she bought some cast-off clothes from the housekeeper. The prices she paid made the housekeeper talk, and she managed to bring away a portrait of the lady. There it is," added Marks, drawing a large photograph from his pocket very slowly as if he set much store by the knowledge it gave.

"Well, you are a chap," said Chudleigh. "The idea of keeping that to yourself. My stars, she *is* a stunner."

And he held the portrait at arm's length in an attitude of profound admiration.

"There's a lot in this, Marks," he said, contemplating the portrait. "There's no end in it. Let's have our dinner."



CHAPTER XXVIII.

A STONE WALL MYSTERY.

THE reports of Chudleigh & Co. were followed by varied consequences. Joshua Cope rubbed his hands with malicious glee and passed a brief eulogy on his own foresight. Eales received the information imparted to him with every mark of concern, and conceived that when his report reached the *Surprise*, his condition of mind would be reflected with indignation and resentment by his client. Isabel having no report, and in ignorance that reports were being made, preserved an even temper, but withal seemed controlled by a purpose. Scotland Yard was in ecstasy: the clue was assuming form and substance.

Marks, in his capacity of Chudleigh & Co., had singular material for his next report to Eales. It was the custom of the head of his staff, when making a continuous watch, to divide the day of twenty-four hours into three sections of eight hours each, from ten in the morning to six in the evening, from six to two in the morning, and from two to ten. It was the duty of the last man to report in person, but an incident had occurred during the night so unusual and indeed inexplicable, that he and his predecessor both waited on Marks together.

The principal watcher was a tall, thin man, named Larney, close cropped as regards hair, with a long fringe of whisker and beard, a broken nose, and thin, straight lips. He had been a game-keeper, having risen from the rank of poacher to the superior function, and he gave one the impression that he would be very sorry if a condition of universal brotherhood and well-doing came to pass. His companion, named Pike, was a short, stout man, with a hook nose, and a super-abundant growth of black hair in every place where hair can grow on a man's face and head, so that having a very low forehead, his black eyes and large nose became unusually prominent. He was untidily dressed in clothes too large for him, and smoked incessantly.

"What's this?" enquired Marks, full of suspicion. "Why is Pike here?"

"For a good reason," said Larney, and his lips compressed so that there were no lips visible at all. "A most estornniery thing took place this mornin' when I was relievin' Pike, and we come together that you might know the rights of it."

Marks being constitutionally indisposed to believe in the moral rectitude of anybody, and having a preference to the belief that all men were liars, concluded that in all probability the two men had been neglecting their duty, and had come to give a circumstantial account of some imaginary incident. He contemplated their appearance for a moment, as he sat in his chair, with his elbows on the table, and then said:

"Go on, Larney"

Larney proceeded, hat in hand, with his story in the firm decisive manner usual with him, while Pike looked on, as if



vastly pleased with the accuracy of a statement he would have found it impossible to make himself. Said Larney:

"I found Pike, Mr. Marks, if you please, at the corner where we wait for relief, and mostly stands, which it commands two

sides of the house—the front and the left side wall of the garden, and it was ezakly two minutes to two.”

This was designed to impress Mr. Marks with Larney’s punctuality, and was stated with much emphasis, but Marks merely blinked over his hands, which covered the lower part of his face as he listened with his elbows on the writing-table.

“We was exchanging a word or two,” continued Larney, “when Pike, who was standing in full view of the street as runs up the left side of the house, says to me, he says ‘Larney,’ he says, ‘there’s two figgers come up from the end of the street.’ I turns, and says, ‘Right you are,’ and altho’ we didn’t suspect nothin’, we put ourselves in the shadder of a portereco as they come along, and turns to watch ’em, when Pike, he says, ‘Larney,’ he says, ‘they’ve wanished;’ and sure as I’m standin’ ’ere this minit they was nowheres to be seen, and all in the little bit o’ time it took for me and Pike to shunt back into the shadder of the portereco; and we looks at each other blank and says, ‘where the Devil have they gone to?’ and that’s what we don’t know now.”

“They went back, I suppose,” suggested Marks.

Larney shook his head, and Pike said “Couldn’t. There worn’t time.” Pike spoke in a whisper, a habit that had its origin in an excess of gin, combined with the sentiment of secrecy associated with his vocation.

“Is there a side gate?” asked Marks.

“No, there ain’t no side gate,” said Larney; “nor yet a hentry of any sort or kind up to the end of the street on either side. There’s a long ’igh stone wall, ten foot ’igh, round the house, without a break exceptin’ in the lane at the back, where the stables is; and on t’other side o’ the street there’s a seven foot brick wall, and some side doors, but the parties couldn’t have crossed the road, without bein’ observed by us; and I tell you, Mr. Marks, they wanished.”

Again Larney’s lips disappeared by reason of the decision he imparted into this deliverance.

“But what has this affair to do with our case?” asked Marks, with an air of petulance.

“Ah,” said Larney, with a shake of the head. “That’s a question we can’t answer. If the parties had come along and had gone by us we should have thought nothin’ of it; but yer

see they come half way up the street and then they wanish clean wanish," repeated Larney, waving his arm.

"You both saw this?" asked Marks. "Or rather you both didn't see it," he added, with a sneer.

"Now, Mr. Marks," responded Larney, in a reproachful tone, "it was dark; there's only one lamp at the end of the street; and not only wasn't we expecting nothin', but it all happened just the very minit we was stepping aside, so as to put ourselves in persition to see 'em to rights. Why our eyes wasn't off 'em three seconds."

"And you were both quite sober?"

"I can answer for myself," said Larney, with dignity; "and I can answer for Pike."

There was a pause, during which Marks made a brief memorandum, and then studied it in silence. Then he said:

"Now what were those men like?"

"Tallish," said Larney; "one was stouter than the other, low-crowned hats, and they walked smart."

"How were they dressed?"

"Too far off to see proper, but the stout one had on a long overcoat, and the other seemed to wear a jacket."

Marks made a note, and then asked:

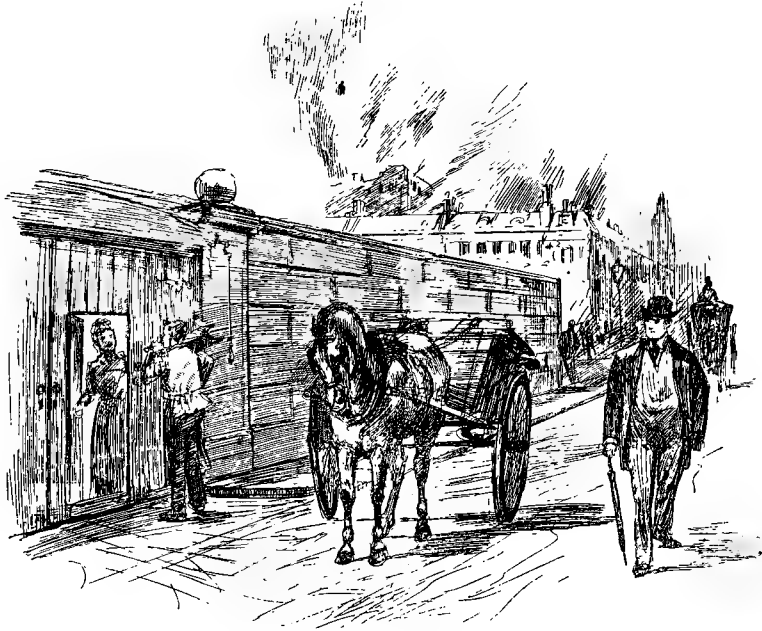
"Did the Scotland Yard men know anything of this?"

"Scotland Yard men!" exclaimed Larney, with ineffable disgust. "They keeps their blessed eyes on the street-door knocker and sets like scarecrows, which they are, and nothin' more nor less."

Later in the morning, a report was brought to Marks that Cheriton had driven up to the house in a cab alone. He carried a small bag with him, having no railway labels on it. The cabman stated he had been hailed by Cheriton outside the Horns Tavern, at Kennington, and knew nothing more of his fare.

Marks ruminated on these statements, and took action. Although he was distinctly inclined to regard the incident as a myth, he felt it was too striking and dramatic not to be used if possible, and it occurred to him that, if he could make it look a little less apochryphal it would enable him to turn out a remarkably good report. He accordingly resolved to visit the spot himself, and see whether broad daylight and what he thought

to be less imaginative observation would explain the mystery Marks was not the person to believe off-hand in the sudden evaporation of two ordinary men, or the passage of flesh and blood through stone walls.



The inspection was made, and Chudleigh received a summons to be in consultation at four o'clock.

Chudleigh found Marks writing when he responded to the summons, and Marks continued writing for fully five minutes after his partner entered, without so much as turning his head. The incident was ominous and aroused the suspicions of Chudleigh, without exciting his apprehension. Chudleigh took up his place on the hearthrug and smoked cigarettes.

Chudleigh's suspicions were in the main right. A desire for freedom had for some time been awakening in the bosom of Marks & Co.—freedom from the insolent assumption of Chudleigh & Co. as displayed in the cigarettes, the velvet waistcoat, and the blue tie. The conviction that Marks & Co. was the cause of the great successes of Chudleigh & Co. was continually thrusting itself upon Marks and provoking a feeling of sullen resentment. Chudleigh, it was true, brought business, but he never worked it out, and the time had come for asserting the relative values of the partners.

Theoretical resolution, however, is seldom reduced to practical realization in such cases, and the superb self-sufficiency of Chudleigh on this occasion, as on all others, reduced the presumption of Marks to helplessness. He had continued writing because his resolution began to ebb immediately Chudleigh entered the room; he ceased to write only when all his resolution had gone out, as it were, at the tip of his pen, and then he turned with the sullen air of a beaten slave to throw a golden opportunity at his partner's feet.

"Well, my friend?" enquired Chudleigh.

Marks coughed, and with a nervous twitching of his face, brought himself back to his normal state of mind. Then, without a word of preface, he said:

"How many people, Chudleigh, should you think were in a house, where they take in about half a sheep and 28 lbs. of beef, besides kidneys, suet, and such things?"

"Where have they been doing that, old man?"

Marks made a gesture of impatience. He had not the courage to raise the question of partnership, but he resented what he regarded as stupidity.

"Never mind where," said he. "Answer the question. It's important."

Chudleigh obeyed.

"It depends upon the pantry. Five-and-twenty people could not use it up, unless there was an ice-house in the establishment."

"It's more than six servants would want, eh?" said Marks, ruminating. "Much more, very much more. It would give a dozen people an allowance of a pound a day for over a week. That's clear."

"That's quite clear," said Chudleigh, lighting another cigarette. "Now make the application." He liked to humour his partner, and never departed from the patronising air, appropriate to the head of the combination. "Half a sheep, and twenty-eight pounds of beef. What does that prove?"

"And kidneys," said Marks.

"All right, kidneys and suet, too; let's see the application. What's the case?"

"Maida Lodge," said Marks. "All that went into the stable entrance to Maida Lodge about one o'clock to-day."

"You don't say so!"

"I do, because I saw it, and more. Smoke was coming out of a chimney on the east side of the house. That means that somebody has come home, and come to stay."

"Looks like it, but who has come home?"

"Don't know."

"Have your men missed them?" asked Chudleigh, with just a suspicion of asperity.

"No," answered Marks, resuming a surly air. "They have not missed them. The only man who has entered the front door is the butler, Cheriton. He has come home, but no one else has been seen to enter the house; yet I'm convinced there's more than one returned."

Then he related the story he had heard that morning from Larney, and suggested the probability of the two men having returned and got into the house by the stable entrance in the lane.

"Larney says 'No'" continued Marks. "He says it was impossible, but I can see no other way, and I am not particular as to the road. That Mr. Louison and his nephew are both there I have not a doubt. How they got there is a secondary matter."

"You're usually right, Marks, and I suppose you're right now. Let's assume you are. Is Scotland Yard still on the job?"

"Yes, but they know nothing of this. All this occurred in the side street and the stable lane. Larney says the two men he saw coming disappeared through the stone wall. He says they had not time to walk back to the lane, but I have examined every inch of the wall and there is no doorway or entrance of any sort. It's a plain solid stone wall of ten feet high built of dressed stone and with a heavy coping on the top of it. There are no marks of scaling on the stone work; and I calculate it would have taken longer to scale it than to go round by the stables."

"Very well," said Chudleigh, "we'll agree to all that, and now, what is to be made of it?"

"Ah," said Marks, ruminating; "what is it we want? We

want Mrs. Cope to go there, don't we? That'll keep the pot boiling, eh?"

"But we've no connection with her," said Chudleigh.

"Oh, yes, we have. She has been to see my client, Eales," said Marks, with a look of cunning not unmixed with contempt.

"You don't say so!"

"Went last evening at six o'clock. You didn't see the report because you were fooling away your time at the Theatre or somewhere; but she did go and she'll go again. At any rate this report will fetch her, and then you shall have a report for Cope. Better not report last night's visit to Eales yet: say she went out shopping."

Marks held a report in his hand for Eales; it was very brief and merely stated that two persons supposed to be Mr. Louison and his nephew were believed to have returned and gained access to Maida Lodge; that Cheriton, the butler, had also returned and went in and out of the house at will, and the house was still being watched by detectives from Scotland Yard.

These few facts were set out with much circumstance with many sage reflections as to what Marks & Co. surmised, and concluding with a declaration that Marks & Co.'s agents were still on the watch.

Chudleigh was pleased to approve of the report and did so with a gracious flourish of his cigarette in the air, and a "Very good, Marks; very good," which observation and manner were unfortunate, for they maddened Marks and caused him to enquire with surly contempt:

"How good? What reason can you give for its being good? You know nothing of the matter, and cannot reason on the facts."

"Indeed," said Chudleigh, still with a lofty air, "Why do you think that?"

"Because," exclaimed Marks, "you have utterly failed to grasp the meaning of the kidneys." He said this looking on the ground, and walking about the room in an irritable manner. Then suddenly, with a curious accession of nervous energy, he exclaimed: "Entrées. Devilled kidneys, on toast!" Then he stopped short and moved about with exhibitions of the same

nervous irritation, and again suddenly he exclaimed: "Sybarites, not servitors. Without the kidneys, my reasoning is inconclusive," saying which, he left the room, convulsed with suppressed passion, and Chudleigh continued his cigarette chuckling over the humour of the situation.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THRESHER RESOLVES TO PAY A VISIT.

THERE are times in the lives of all of us when even in the most innocent circumstances we are subject to all the irksomeness engendered by guilt ; and it is almost certain that the unjustly accused suffer more from the fear that suspicion concerning them may rest in the minds of their friends than an actual criminal will experience throughout the whole of his trial and punishment.

David Thresher, possessed of an unusually sensitive nature, shrank with horror when contemplating the possibility of such suspicion, and the seclusion his uncle advised him to have recourse to rather increased than allayed the misery of his position. The tender solicitude of the old man and his anxiety to utilise the admirable resources of Maida Lodge for this purpose of concealment, brought home to him with irresistible force the fact that he was hiding. The idea was maddening, and throughout the whole of the day succeeding his mysterious entrance into the house, he racked his brains to discover by what means he could cease to be a fugitive and at the same time avoid offending his host. Obviously innocence was incompatible with hiding, and he had no recourse but to endeavour to make clear to his uncle the evil consequences of concealment.

They had finished lunch, which had been served by Cheriton in the dining-room, with unusual celerity, and with the door locked—two conditions that were prompted by motives Cheriton would not have dared to confess even to himself. Cheriton's nervous excitement was not allayed until he had his master and guest on the other side of King Charles's portrait, for he was at this time wholly unaware of the fact that Scotland Yard had penetrated the mysteries of the inner chamber and knew all about the Vandyke. Cheriton was, of course, a strong advocate for the policy of resistance to authority.

The duel began in the library. Thresher selected a book deliberately, and sauntering to an easy chair, opened the book

on his knee, when he appeared to become languid and abstracted. He had carefully thought out his plan of attack, and the book was an essential property in the comedy he proposed to play.

His uncle, on the other hand, watched every movement with the keenest interest; and the fact of his settling down in an easy chair after lunch with a book gave him special satisfaction. It indicated a comparatively contented mind. He was, however, soon undeceived. With a deep-drawn sigh, and in tones little above a whisper, Thresher asked, as if of himself:

“How is this to end?”

The old man looked up with a start, and fixing his eyes upon his nephew, said:

“How should it end, but in your safety and freedom?”

There was something of impatience in his remark, as if he resented the suggestion that his method was tainted with error.

“I regret,” said Thresher in appealing tones—“I very much regret to say I cannot feel safety in hiding and concealment.”

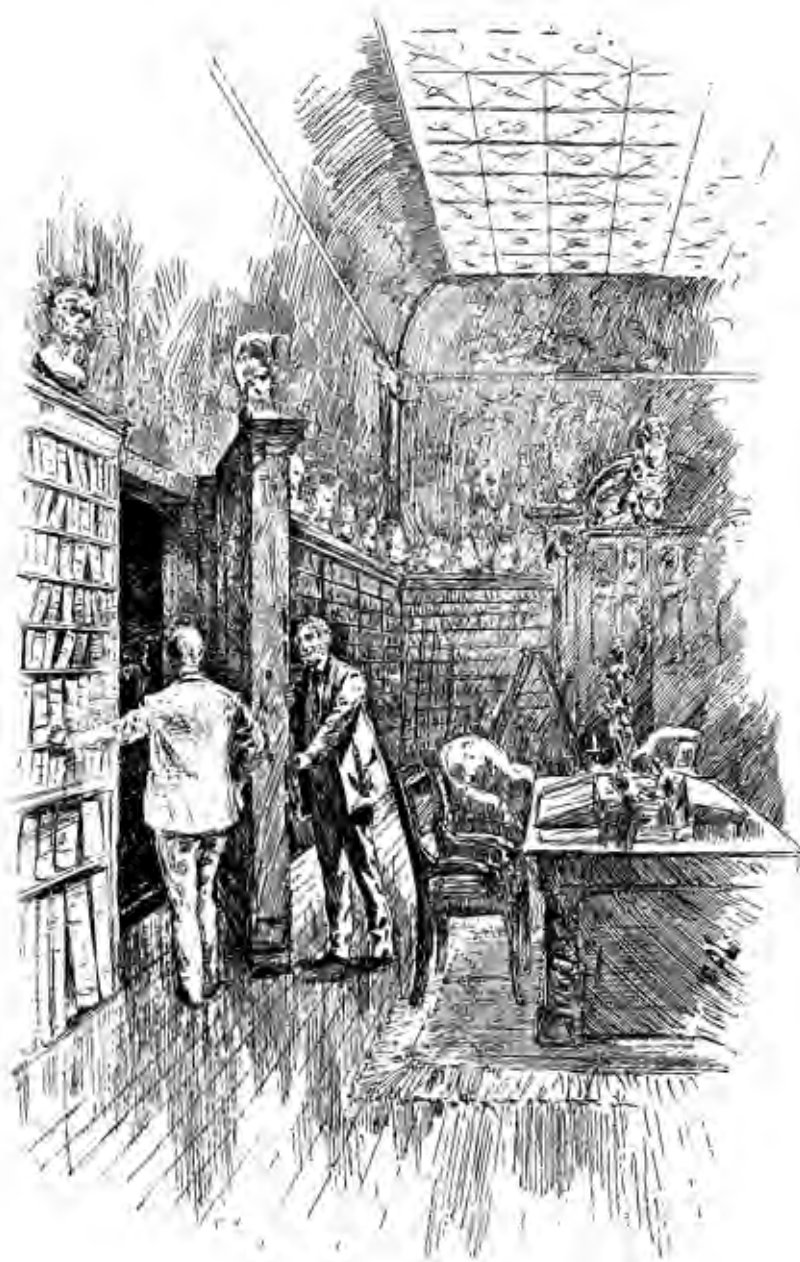
“This is not hiding!” said the old man. “You cannot be said to be hiding when you are staying in your uncle’s house.”

“I have knowledge,” was the reply, in firm and solemn tones, “that a grave charge has been made against me, and I see by the newspapers that I am being sought for by the police. It is not compatible with innocence to refrain from declaring myself. The initial step in proof of my innocence is to go at once to the police. You say I am not hiding: shall I walk out?”

He rose up as he said this, as if he would put the proposal into immediate execution. He was met with a look of horror, and the exclamation:

“Good God, my boy, you mustn’t do that! The house is watched day and night.”

“Then we must admit that I am hiding,” said Thresher, with his lip quivering, and his face blanched. “I am being actually pursued by the police, and I am hiding. An innocent man doesn’t hide. It is the guilty who hide. I am afraid,” he added, in a hollow voice, “that you have in the bottom of your heart some fear that I am guilty and you would save me.”



"No, my boy, no—nothing of the kind. We'll go back to the boat to-night. You will be safe there."

Thresher shook his head with a melancholy smile, rose and paced the room.

"Yes," said the old man. "Nothing could be easier. We'll go as we came. No one will see us."

Again Thresher shook his head. Then he said firmly and impressively, standing before his uncle :

"You are asking me to act dishonourably. You are asking me to put on an appearance of guilt and proclaim myself a fugitive from justice. To do so would be literally suicide. They would hang me and I should deserve to be hanged for being a coward and a traitor to myself."

"No, no," said the old man. "We must get out of the way. No one knows we are here except Cheriton ; and no one need know that we have ever been here."

An idea occurred to Thresher. He had no knowledge at this time how he had come into the room in which he stood. They had entered during the darkness, and when a light was struck he had no means of identifying even the side of the room at which he had entered. He had presumed later that he must have come in by the Vandyke portrait, but as he had no knowledge of the house beyond the dining-room he could only conjecture, and felt it would be as well if he informed himself definitely. Accordingly he asked,

"How can we leave the house unobserved?"

"See, see," said the old man eagerly, thinking he had gained a point, if not secured a victory. As he spoke he removed a book from the case behind his chair, put his hand in the vacant place and drew out the entire set of shelves on a hinge, disclosing a narrow stone staircase.

"There," said he, "that's how you came in and that's how you can get out without anyone being the wiser."

"Does this lead into the street?" enquired Thresher.

"Come, I will show you."

They descended to a small chamber dimly lighted and all of solid stone like a prison cell, except that on one side there was a large iron door of unusual width, provided with a powerful and delicately constructed bolt.

"Did you see me," asked the old man, "on the night we arrived put my hand to the coping stone? I think not, but you saw me raise my hand. I did so to lift the coping stone, and in doing so I depressed this rod. See, I can do it here. Now the door is free ; and the least pressure upon the wall outside will cause the heavy stones to open inwards. See."

The old man pulled a handle and the great iron door moved an inch or two, and then was immediately closed to prevent observation from without. He then commenced explaining, with great minuteness and childish delight, that five of the massive stones of the wall were carried in an iron framework, and that when closed the interstices were concealed by the accuracy of the masonry, and the fact that the bevil of the movable stones was in each instance continued behind its neighbour.

"The key is very simple," said the old man impressively. "Press the twelfth coping stone from the stable lane half-an-inch upwards. That done, the slightest pressure on the stones below will cause them to yield, and you can enter."

"And you think we should use this to-night?" asked Thresher.

"Yes, to-night. There's no moon to-night."

"Let us return," said Thresher. "I have something to say."

Thresher led the way back to the library with deliberation, and when they had closed the door, he took his uncle by the hand and said :

"I would like to use that exit to-night, sir," and then, with a little tremor of his lip he added, "but I beg of you do not ask me to return to the boat until I have paid a visit."

"To whom?" asked the old man excitedly.

"To Scotland Yard. I must no longer run the risk of being taken like a criminal."

The old man was much shocked, and for the moment did not respond. There was something in the manner of Thresher which forbade resistance, but although he did not openly resist, he hoped something would happen to prevent the catastrophe. As the day wore on this hope faded, and although little had been said, a sentiment of unison grew up between the uncle and nephew in the direction arrived at by

Thresher. So it came to pass an hour or two after dinner—little having been said up to that time—that the old man continued the conversation of the afternoon.

“I have been thinking,” said he, “of what you said about the door downstairs, and I am unable to avoid the conclusion that you are right; but strange and terrible things have happened in the matter of false verdicts. I am an old man now, and your companionship the last few days has been a new life to me. Perhaps I have been wrong in continuing by myself for so long, but let that pass. You are going out from here to face the world and to demand trial on a groundless charge. You do this with a full knowledge that in defiance of the theory of the law almost everyone believes you guilty merely because you are charged. I commend your courage and approve your sense of honour, but the contemplation of the possibilities fills me with terrible forebodings.”

He paused, labouring under much excitement. Presently he would have resumed, but Thresher interposed :

“You are very good,” said he, “to let me have my way, and you must not think me selfish in exacting it. The necessities of the case are paramount, and I am sure you will never regret the step I am about to take, whatever the consequences. There are some things men are called upon to do, condemned by reason, and repugnant to natural impulse, but which, undone, would make their lives a curse to them. I cannot live in hiding or in flight; and the knowledge that you have confidence in me and would retain me near you, only because of your love for me, renews my hope of returning to enjoy the pleasure of your companionship.”

He spoke cheerfully, but the old man shook his head as he replied :

“I do not expect you will return here to-night, but if you should do so, come to the front door. As for myself I must take a new departure. I shall send at once for Eales, and advise with him. We must be active. We must not rest. I put no trust in a British jury for the discernment of the truth—without assistance.”

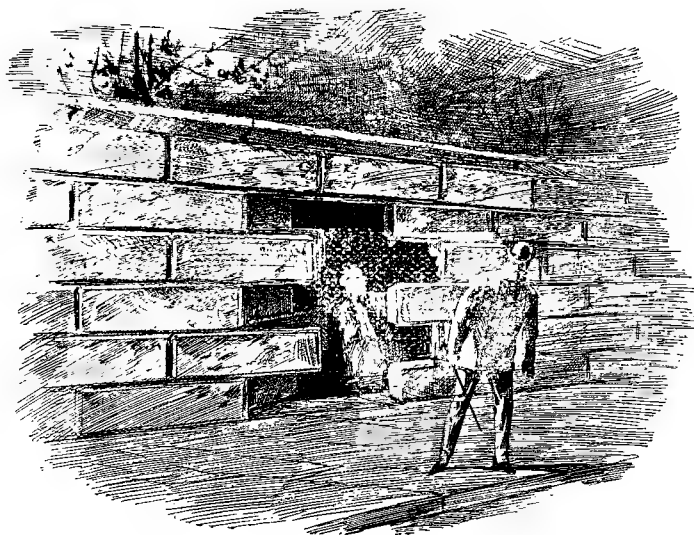
Thresher was silent for a moment, and then said in a quiet, restrained manner :

“You may be right, sir, indeed you are right; but for all

that the risk must be run. I could not live without facing the situation."

They then became silent, and remained so. The hour or so that followed was a gloomy time for both of them, and both avoided the subject which most occupied and depressed them. They spent the time in reading or endeavouring to read; and soon after midnight, Thresher approached his uncle with his watch in his hand. The old man, silently responsive, opened up the staircase and conducted his nephew to the outer wall. Adjusting the mechanism, he caused the stone door to fall in a couple of inches, and then, taking Thresher by the hand, he wished him "God speed."

Thresher responded with a silent pressure of the hand. In another moment he was outside on the pavement, and the wall closed behind him.



CHAPTER XXX.

AN HONOURABLE SURRENDER.



DAVID THRESHER did not return to Maida Lodge, and the country was electrified by a brief announcement in the morning papers that he had given himself up. Before the day was out, he was as good as convicted and hanged, by the general consensus of opinion, for the multitude is always prone to believe the evil spoken of the individual; and although a few regarded the visit of David Thresher to Scotland Yard as evidence of innocence, the common belief was

that he was compelled to the act by contrition.

When Thresher emerged from the wall of Maida Lodge he hastened to Piccadilly, and took the first cab he could find. He experienced a feeling of relief and satisfaction as he found himself safely on the road to Scotland Yard, uncontaminated by the bonds of the thief-taker. It was a matter of ambition with him, and something more than common prudence, to go voluntarily in response to a demand for his presence by the State. He paid the cabman double fare, at the door of the police-office, and entered with a light and cheerful manner; but cool and self-possessed as was his aspect, his heart beat a wild and bounding measure as he asked for the Inspector on duty. The interview between Thresher and the Inspector was constrained. Said the Inspector, in official tones, and with a bearing magnificent for rigid formality and exactness:

“What can I do for you, sir?”

“My name is David Thresher,” was the answer, with just a shade of nervousness in the tone. “I have arrived in London from a yachting cruise, and I have called to ascertain whether it is true that you are in search of me.”

This answer was sufficiently startling to awaken the official mind to the knowledge that the surrender was the act of a man of honour who was controlled by mature reflection, and not by sudden impulse, but with that inability, common among the slaves of routine, to construe a novel situation, the

Inspector's first idea was to prevent the man who called himself David Thresher repenting of his surrender.

"Maguire," said the Inspector, calling to a constable at the door, "this is David Thresher. Be in attendance."



The officer responded, and the Inspector, without any outward sign of emotion, resumed the conversation by informing Thresher that he must consider himself in custody, and that whatever he said would be taken down and used against him. Thresher, somewhat nettled at the brusque officialism, responded, with asperity :

"That warning is superfluous and irregular. This is not a police-court, and you are not a magistrate. I shall say what I wish to ; and as I have come here of my own accord, you will have no need to fear I shall attempt to run away, if you wish me to stay."

This rebuke was an imprudence, but the occasion was not productive of calm reflection and cool action. David Thresher had resolved to face the world, and was reckless about trifles.

The Inspector reflected, made some memoranda in a book lying open on his desk ; and, without saying another word, left his post, nodding significantly as he did so to the officer he had practically charged with the custody of Thresher.

In less than twenty minutes, thereafter, David Thresher was left to his reflections in a cell at the Bow Street Police Office, charged with the murder of two women whom he had never seen, and whose names he had never heard before they were read out to him by the officer who received him.

Up to this time he had been sustained by a commanding

sense of social obligation. No room for doubt existed in his mind of the propriety of his action ; he was conscious only of an all-powerful impulse to respond to a public challenge, reflecting upon his honour ; and he was buoyed up by a profound conviction that he would succeed in unmasking the popular error. But now, in the loneliness of a prison cell, unsustained by the presence of even opposing friends, and bereft of the exhilarating influence of a consciousness of freedom, the heroic sentiments died. The hard, cold, unpromising evidence of restraint, subjection, and shame surrounded him, and his blood chilled. The crisis over, his energy abated ; hunger, too, asserted itself, and he became a prey to despondency.

Sleep was impossible, and as the night wore on, he tried to reason back his confidence. His limited knowledge of the circumstances in which he was placed caused him, with justice, to regard the action of the police as the height of absurdity. He knew of only one ground for suspicion regarding him, and that was his presence in Brighton on the fatal night. This he was prepared to admit. His presence in the house where the women had died was the one incident of his whole life he was resolved to conceal. Could this be known ? He believed not, but the doubt revived with persistent iteration, and, acquiring force as the night wore on, it ultimately exerted an influence that was simply appalling.

Then followed another and more terrible thought : the taint of the jail was now upon him, never to be removed, because the fact of actual imprisonment could never be obliterated. The reassuring reflection that a man is always innocent until proved to be guilty, gave him no consolation. The fact that he had been spared the indignity of manacles was an incident that, however consolatory, was incapable of mitigating the compromising fact of confinement in a police cell.

The whole range of his future life—its hopes and ambitions, were now dulled, dwarfed, and disfigured—shrouded in an impenetrable mist, and robbed of every particle of interest.

Even Isabel he regarded only as a spectator of his degradation ; but in her case he had the knowledge that she, at least, was without suspicion of his guilt, and this was the one

solitary gleam of sunshine that was left him, when the morning broke, and from sheer exhaustion he fell asleep. He dreamed of her, and curiously, his dream was almost prophetic. So accurate was his construction of the line her thoughts would move in, that his unguided wanderings imagined her in conference with Eales, and so it chanced within an hour of his dreaming.

There was no sort of doubt in the mind of Isabel as to the part she had to play in this drama, the first scene of which was about to open before the delighted public. Her course was clear before her, and her courage high.

It was three o'clock in the morning, when Eales heard of the action of his friend and client. It was past four when he applied at Bow Street, and was told he could not see his man till nine. It was five when his messenger rang up Mrs. Cope's household, in Park Lane, and at six he was in Isabel's boudoir, without the presence of Lady Arabella. Joshua Cope was down with his nailers, engaged as will hereafter appear; and Mr. Louison had not yet given up all hope of his nephew's return, so he had not taken the tremendous step of summoning Eales to Maida Lodge for the unprecedented incident of a personal interview.

Isabel did not disguise from herself the seriousness of the crisis, nor did she seek to limit the range of the programme proposed by Eales. She listened with marked anxiety to the array of facts he unfolded, and weighed them with the precision of a lawyer. Some of them were new, and of startling significance. Thresher's presence in Brighton, at the time of the occurrence, she admitted, as within her own knowledge, and also that of Lady Arabella. She said they had spoken to him; but when Eales declared that the police asserted that he was actually seen issuing from the front door of the house, at half-past two in the morning, she suppressed an exclamation of horror, and said with comparative calm:

"Impossible."

"Can we prove it to be impossible?"

"I always understood you lawyers declined the attempt to prove a negative," she answered, with that suggestion of irritation that strong natures so frequently exhibit when unexpected facts stand in the way of their wilfulness. "They cannot prove his leaving the house; it's absurd."

"They say they can prove by the night porter his late return home to his hotel, after the time he was seen by the policeman on the beat, to leave the house."

Isabel winced; it needed all her courage to listen without betraying her thoughts. She rose and paced the room, with flashing eyes and her hands clenched. It was not despair but anger—anger at an adverse fate.

"What more?" she asked.

"In response to a search warrant," said Eales, "his rooms have been ransacked, and a key has been found that fits the lock of the front door from which the policeman saw him come."

"Never."

"They assert it, and that is a statement that can be proved or disproved without question. But there is more. They declare they have found in his rooms some white plaster identical in character with that in which the poison was encased in the eggs."

"Impossible," exclaimed Isabel. "Why, Mr. Eales, are you not his friend?" she asked, indignantly. "Why do you say these things?"

"I am his friend," said Eales, impressively, "and I repeat these things because they have to be met."

"But they are lies—horrible lies," she exclaimed.

"They may be, but also they may be facts."

"How dare you say that?"

"Facts, capable of explanation, perhaps common-place explanation."

"Of course they are! What is the explanation?"

"That we have to discover. I am now going to see our friend, and he may help us."

Eales continued by suggesting numerous possible explanations of each damning fact. Keys, he said, were often found to open locks they were never intended for; white cement was common in households all over the land for mending china and nicknacks, so was spirits of wine, in which it was assumed this particular cement was softened; and as for the supposed midnight visitor, mistaken identity was the most reasonable explanation of an incident that perhaps had no more solid foundation than the imagination of the policeman who had described it.

This was comforting to Isabel, for the propositions were delivered with a jaunty air of assumed self-confidence, calculated to allay anxiety; but the hope they awakened was of brief duration, for, overtopping, permeating, and withering this embrasure was the solid fact of Thresher's presence in the house on the night in question—a fact that none could demonstrate more conclusively than she, and not only did this fact reduce to impotence every presumption that could be suggested, but threatened to overwhelm her, also, in the impending catastrophe.

Before the interview ended, she charged Eales with a message for the man she loved :

“ Tell him,” she said, “ I shall rest neither day nor night until his freedom from this charge is assured.”

And in due time, back came the answer:

“ Say I am grateful for so ungrudging a promise, but that I beg of her on no account to identify herself with me or my defence, as her reputation is to me more sacred than my life, and she must remember that she is married to another.”



CHAPTER XXXI.

AN AWAKENING.

MORALISTS have held that one of the dangers of a high state of civilisation is the probable decadence of the people through the enervating influences of luxury; but a greater evil is now being realised in the creation of a universal mediocrity, the persistent repetition of uninteresting patterns of human beings, and the gradual elimination of all chance of recurring examples of original capacity. To such an extent is this condition of things growing that one accepts the extravagance of the artistic or literary mountebank, and the phantasmagoria of any brand-new philosophy with complacency if not with satisfaction. So, therefore, however much the energy and ingenuity displayed by Mr. Louison was misapplied, his eccentricities were at least agreeable, from the fact that they were a contrast to the humdrum repetition of life upon life in Mayfair. Having regard to his ultimate purposes, his course was commendable; and he now showed that, in the presence of an emergency, he could remove the mask, and cease from the pastime of playing hide-and-seek with the world. He also proved himself a man of resource, because, when he received his solicitor in his library with the Charles the First doorway standing wide open, his manner and method were so perfect in all respects that the nervous man was Eales, not Louison; and Eales would have been puzzled to say whether he was not more amazed at finding himself in the presence of his client, than he had been from the fact that, during the whole of the period he had worked for him he had been obliged to take him on trust.

"Mr. Joseph Eales, I presume," said the old gentleman rising, "I'm glad to make your acquaintance. Your father was long a faithful friend to me, and you, I am glad to know, have been no less."

Eales bowed, acknowledged the gracious compliment, and hoped the relations would be equally agreeable in the future

They then sat down at the library table, Mr. Louison with his back to the secret doorway and Eales opposite to him. There was a pause. It was obviously difficult for Eales to take the lead, and yet he had much to say that must sooner or later be said. He waited for his client to recommence the conversation, and watched him as he methodically arranged his papers and his books. It was thus, thought Eales to himself, he reviewed my weekly statements, and went through them away here in the quiet recesses of Maida Lodge, lighted by the window from above, and excluded from all the outer world—the noise of traffic, the intrusion of callers, and the officious care of relatives.

“Mr. Eales,” said the old gentleman, “this interview is a variation of our practice hitherto. I propose we continue to meet weekly at this hour and on this day of the week, the papers having been delivered the day before. These meetings will be for our ordinary business. We have now, however, some extraordinary and very pressing business. It is that we have met to discuss to-day.”

Eales assented generally, being still undesirous of breaking the current of Mr. Louison’s thoughts.

“Mr. Eales,” he resumed, sitting in his reading chair with one hand on the table and looking away in the distance, “Mr. Eales, I have broken the custom of the past and sent for you especially to-day to consult on the subject of the defence of my nephew, David Thresher. I charge myself with that duty. Mr. Eales, I desire that you spare no trouble or expense, but command the resources of the Universe to put an end to the absurd charge that our enemies have devised to annoy us.”

The reference to “our enemies” revived in Eales’s mind a suspicion of the old mania, but, being wise, he made no comment, and proceeded straightway to the subject of the projected defence.

“He is my sister’s son, Mr. Eales,” said the old man gazing wistfully across the room as if in reverie, with his left hand lying listlessly on the table, his right on the arm of the chair, and sadness in every tone of his voice.

He remained so for some time, and Eales waited with growing sympathy. The opportunity for him to speak on matters that were uppermost in his mind had not yet come.

"Mr. Eales," said the old man, turning to him, "I think it will be best, now that we have become personally acquainted, that I should speak quite fully to you as I used to your father. You will be able to assist me better if I think aloud to you. We shall make fewer mistakes if we consult without reserve."

Eales bowed assent, but still waited. He wanted his client to define their relations in his own way. Mr. Louison resumed:

"The thing that weighs most heavily upon me just now, that oppresses me even more than the knowledge of the peril in which my nephew stands, is the fear that I have in some way been the cause of his present position, or have at least contributed to that cause, by specific actions, or generally by a manner of life that has in some way influenced events to his detriment."

Here was an opportunity for Eales, and he took it. Said he, "I regret to say I feel there is cause, sir, for your fear."

"Ah," exclaimed the old man in a state of great nervous excitement, "you say so. It's most unfortunate, but who could foresee it? And, you know, the catastrophe has happened almost at the very moment of my gaining a knowledge of my nephew's disposition, and on the very day on which I had discovered that his companionship was to become the first necessity for my future happiness. It's a fearful punishment for a mere error of judgment. But do you really think I could be held responsible for such consequences?"

He asked the question with a look of eager enquiry, and an answer in the negative turned the expression on his face to one of extreme sadness.

"You cannot be held responsible," said Eales, "for the consequences of actions innocent in themselves, although unusual, especially when, as is the case in this instance, the consequences are the result only of reflection, and have no actual connection with the event you deplore."

"I do not understand you," said the old man with a return of the eager look; and Eales, who had been purposely a little obscure, found himself getting full possession of the field. He resumed:

"You are probably aware that your recent absence has been a subject of enquiry by the police."

"Yes," said the old man with a curious expression of unconcern coming over his face. "Yes; Cheriton told me something of that, but it was quite unnecessary—quite."

"I am afraid I must divide the responsibility of the enquiry with Cheriton," said Eales, looking fixedly at his client, "and perhaps Cheriton would say I was wholly responsible."

"Oh," said Mr. Louison, with all nervousness and anxiety thoroughly dispersed, and in their place a sharp business-like manner, that may be described as almost snappy

"I was summoned by your housekeeper, as your solicitor," said Eales, "and I proceeded to act as your solicitor in the only way I or any other solicitor in similar circumstances could act."

"Oh," repeated Mr. Louison, with the same expression, and again Eales proceeded. He was getting the facts laid out, so as to ascertain, without the risk of offending his client by direct questions the exact grounds and method of the supposed kidnapping. Said he :

"I was informed that you had been kidnapped, and I immediately went to Scotland Yard to have you found."

"And Scotland Yard didn't find me, eh?"

Eales laughed.

"I was not kidnapped," said the old man, with a whimsical smile. "I walked out of my house, as any man has a right to do, and went on a yachting cruise, as any man has a right to do, and as I have done at any time I chose during the last ten or twenty years."

Mr. Louison looked across the table with a triumphant smile, as if he would challenge criticism on his conduct in relation to his rights as a British subject.

"There can be no question of your right to go and come as you please, sir, nor can there be any question as to your right to seclusion; what we are concerned about, however, is not your right, but the consequences of what has happened through the exercise of your undoubted right."

"That's very good, Mr. Eales; very good. I'm beginning to understand you. I accept the principle, but shouldn't we get at once to the matter of my nephew's position?"

"I'm dealing with that position. It would not be proper for me to criticise your conduct, even inferentially, but with a view to your nephew's defence."

"Go on, Mr. Eales," said the old man, with a revival of earnestness. "Go on as fast as you can. I'm at your service."

"Well, sir, you have met your nephew in the north; you've been yachting with him; and you have been sailing about the west coast of Scotland at a time when the police were seeking your nephew, and for days and days they could find no trace of you or of him."

"Quite right," said Mr. Louison, with a chuckle. It was impossible for him to restrain his delight at the success of his scheme of seclusion.

"This should be explained," said Eales; "but when we set to work we meet a difficulty on the very threshold. The police have been apprised of and have been solicited to enquire into your sudden and mysterious disappearance from your house under the impression that you had been kidnapped. The evidence that you had been kidnapped was complete on the surface; but a doubt arises, whether, if the statements and circumstances were proved, collusion could not also be proved."

"Between whom?"

"You and your man Cheriton."

"Very good, Mr. Eales. That is how the case presents itself to you as a lawyer. We will have Cheriton in and you shall examine him."

"Presently, if you will; but before seeing Cheriton I want to show you what we have to clear up."

Mr. Louison nodded, and Eales proceeded:

"Cheriton reports that you were kidnapped, and that he was bound and gagged. You say you were not kidnapped, but left the house of your own accord to go yachting. Cheriton's wife confirms her husband's statement in essential particulars by what she says she saw; and others of the household add to the confirmation by other less important particulars. Then four things happen. Cheriton goes off after the fruitless police enquiry and joins you straight; and your nephew apparently does the same immediately after occurrences in which he had played a part, and which have caused his name to be associated with the commission of a crime. You remain on the sea for days holding no communication with the land, so far as I or anyone else knows; and then you all three return to this

house together suddenly, and by means that no one can divine, for the house has been watched day and night, as you know, ever since you disappeared."

"Well put, Mr. Eales," said the old man, still controlled by delight at the completeness of his devices for evading intrusion.

"Yes," exclaimed Eales, with his eyes flashing. Departing, for the first time, from his cool matter-of-fact manner, and, becoming eloquent, he proceeded :

"Yes, Mr. Louison, that may be well put ; but it will be put better and stronger by the other side, and it will go far to prove the case against your nephew, because, at the back of all this, they will exhibit circumstances and conditions that will provide an abundant motive for his committing the very crime he is charged with. Moreover, you may be charged with a guilty knowledge. It is this we have to face, and it is this we have to explain away "

The old man became grave, and his aspect encouraged Eales to go on. He could not rid himself of the idea that his client was the victim of mania. There was abundant cause for the suspicion, yet he had strong hopes that it was merely a case of harmless eccentricity. The truth as to this question was of the first importance in guiding Eales as to his conduct of Thresher's defence ; and he set to work thoroughly to arouse his client to a sense of the urgency of the position. Accordingly he continued his argument, saying :

"There is yet another point which adds to our difficulty, and may result in a new and very serious personal anxiety for your future."

"Go on," said the old man, still gravely.

"Well, sir, it was suggested by the detective, who enquired into the matter of your disappearance, that you, Mr. Walter Louison, may have been dead for twenty years past, and that the person now representing himself as Mr. Louison was an imposter, appropriating Mr. Louison's revenues, and hoping to inherit more by this alleged personation."

"But here I am," exclaimed the old man, seriously alarmed.

"Yes, you, whom I see before me, are here, but I have never seen you before this day, and it becomes necessary that you assist me to find evidence to prove that you are yourself,

because not only is this of importance in itself, but if doubt is cast upon your identity, and the allegation is made in Court that you are a personator, a jury would be prone to believe that you and Thresher were conspirators."

"But I can bring dozens of people who have been out yachting with me at any time during these thirty years."

"Yes," said Eales, "under the name of Speezer; but why should we suppose Speezer is Louison?"

"Because I am the same?"

"Who now living can certify that during all the years of your seclusion, Mr. Speezer on board his yacht is Mr. Louison of Maida Lodge?"

"Cheriton."

"Anyone else?"

The old man reflected, and was ultimately bound to confess there was no one.

"Then," said Eales, "Cheriton is insufficient, and your dilemma is extreme. Cheriton is one of your party. The theory of the prosecution will be that he was in league with you, and, being under your control as his master, that he aided in what they will describe as the conspiracy."

Matters having been probed thus far, and Mr. Louison's mind having now become thoroughly awakened to a true sense of the position, it was resolved to call in Cheriton, and with a view the better to inform himself and show to Mr. Louison what would happen if Cheriton was put in a witness-box, Eales insisted upon questioning Cheriton himself.

Cheriton came in with the old terrier instinct revived; he glanced from one to the other with comical alertness, and exhibited all the signs of extreme nervousness combined with obstinate determination to play his master's game.

"Do you remember," asked Eales, "that on the morning I was sent for, because of the non-appearance of Mr. Louison, you said he was kidnapped?"

Cheriton looked sharply towards his master in hopes of a hint, and found his master gravely mending a quill pen. Cheriton accordingly knit his brows, looked at his boots, and said:

"Yes, sir, I thought so."

"How then was it you went straight to Mr. Louison on leaving here after the investigation?"

"Because Mr. Louison had arranged to go north to purchase a yacht, and I felt certain if he was able he would go to the place arranged, and I went to see."

"Why didn't you make us acquainted with this before?"

Another quick glance at his master and his questioner followed by an inspection of his boots, resulted in a diplomatic answer:

"I have never spoken of master's intentions. He doesn't like it."

"But this might have put us on the track."

Too quick came the answer:

"He didn't want it."

Eales looked at his client significantly, and then said he had nothing more to ask of Cheriton, who withdrew, without in the least being aware he had admitted collusion in the comedy of his master's abduction, and shown conclusively that he could never be trusted in a witness-box to make plain the innocent character of the alleged abduction and the equally innocent journey of Thresher to the north.

"And to think," said the old man, "that my poor nephew is now in prison."



CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FIRST ACT.

THE Brighton murder became the topic of the hour. The Parliamentary session was about ending, and the political drama had become stale and correspondingly uninteresting. The Bow Street Police Court—always a centre of attraction to those afflicted with the craving for the melodrama of life—provided the closing sensation of the season ; and the magistrate of the day, rising to the demands of his audience, proceeded, with all the form and circumstance the simple incident permitted, to consider the question as to whether he should or should not remit David Thresher to the Brighton magistrates on the charge of murder.

What is it about crime and allegation of crime that attracts ? Is it the otherwise latent demoniacal spirit in man assuming the ascendant, and rejoicing over the fact that another has succumbed to passion or despair ? Is it the revival of that instinct suppressed by civilisation which gloats over a victim's sufferings, laughs at his wounds, and laves its hands in his blood ? Immediately and directly it must come from the exaggeration and distortion of the hunting and fighting spirit, which finds legitimate expression in the work of the pioneer, in athletics, and in sportsmanlike sport.

The court was crowded with the ordinary attendants on the administration of justice, and many others not usually found among the regular representatives of the British public.



The motly crowd at the back of the court were supported in their desire to see the law administered with decorum and impartiality by at least half-a-dozen men who, but for this event, would have been in Pall Mall or the park, two or three law students, who attended as a duty and a right, a clergyman who frequented police-courts as a student of human nature, and a local butcher to whom the police-court was a theatre. Of course the journalist was there of every shade of character and disposition, from the dull chronicler of sober fact to the latter-day pest, who interviews everyone connected with anything concerning which he can manage by hook or by crook to form a text, upon which he can hang what he calls a moral. They were all there cynically indifferent to every human aspiration, and sympathetic only for what has come to be known as a "sensation"—an eager, striving, callous, but persistent army, the precise embodiment in exact ratio of the public they serve, for if the public did not demand their exaggeration and distortion, their inaccuracy and unreason, they would not be.

And standing in the midst of the crowd, solitary, and excluded from all participation in the commanding interest of the scene, was David Thresher, as pale as if in death, but absolutely calm and erect—not defiant, but resolute, and no one in the court who had a fair look at his face could fail to be struck with the depth and charm of his large dark eyes, the power of which was heightened by the extreme pallor of his forehead. The women in the court "thought it lovely."

The facts and circumstances of the incident that had caused the gathering were stated with much complacency by the representative of the Crown, two or three facts were formally deposed to, the warrant was exhibited, and the order to remit the prisoner was made, as a matter of course.

The whole affair lasted only ten minutes, and the spectators felt they had a grievance in being treated to so little after so much anxious struggling and waiting. Justice, however, is proverbially indifferent to small grievances, and the attendant public dispersed with the feeling that there were some wrongs for which the law provided no remedy.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A CONFLAGRATION.

ISABEL'S first impulse was to join her strength with the legitimate defenders of her friend, but her interview with Eales had set her thinking much more seriously on the position she herself occupied in the case.

In full accordance with her message to Thresher, and, in a modified sense, with the spirit of his rejoinder, Isabel resolved to act, not only independently, but with vigour. She set out to see her husband !

It was necessary that she should protect herself as the first step towards protecting her friend, and before starting for the Midlands she wrote two notes to Mr. Ware that very much increased the old gentleman's respect and admiration for her ; and, reviving the natural gallantry of his disposition, caused him to swear something very much like an oath of knightly allegiance to his brilliant client, all in the secret recesses of his inner room, and altogether beyond the knowledge of even his confidential clerk.

"My dear Mr. Ware," wrote Isabel, "I have again to trespass upon your good nature in a matter that causes me some anxiety I refer to the consequences of the deaths of the two women servants in the house we had at Brighton. I have been catechised by the police, and am afraid our names will be brought in at the various public proceedings. I should be much obliged if you would watch these proceedings on my behalf, especially to prevent my being further mixed up with the case. I enclose a note that will introduce you to Mr. Eales, the solicitor to my unfortunate friend, whom I desire all in my power to assist. You will much oblige me if you would speak to him, and say how much I should like you to co-operate."

"I will," said Mr. Ware, "I will ; with all my heart, I will."

And the old gentleman stood up and kissed his hand to an imaginary Mrs. Cope in the far distance.

And he did speak to Mr. Eales to the advantage of all concerned, for his circumspection could not fail to be of use in any matter whatsoever.

Isabel's first impulse was to go alone to Halesowen, but on reflection she concluded it would be prudent to continue her policy of entrenchment within a circumvallation of domestics, and certainly on a mission in which it may become apparent to one's opponent that your very existence is undesirable, it is advisable to have other people about. Jacobs the maid and Jacobs the valet therefore were in attendance.

Lady Arabella would have been useful on this occasion, but Lady Arabella had found it expedient to go on the Continent without leaving her address. Lady Arabella had come to the conclusion on the day the detectives had questioned her that dear Mrs. Cope was all very well, but that her friendship could be purchased at too dear a price. She did not so much object to the poisoning—of course she was very sorry for the women, she said—but policemen and coroners and people of that sort were most objectionable. She really couldn't think of being mixed up with them and their vulgarities, so as soon as the news came to her that David Thresher had given himself up, she packed up her wardrobe and departed, leaving a little note:

"So sorry, my dear, but my uncle has telegraphed for me, and it is absolutely impossible for me to deny him. None of us dare do so. If you want me very much telegraph and I will come at once. So very sorry, but see you again soon."

The capacity for graceful lying is brought to such a high state of perfection in these days that honest, straightforward folk like Isabel fail to recognise that it is lying, and the cynical wonder whether it is not better to have the lies; they're so much more amusing.

So Lady Arabella went out of the life of dear Mrs. Cope reflecting that she had had a very narrow escape, and not quite sure that her delicate reputation was not a little smirched by the contact; but she consoled herself with the knowledge that people have short memories, especially in society where



scandal follows scandal with frivolous volubility; and, being conscious of this failing personally, she had in the goodness of her heart packed up a few keepsakes of dear Mrs. Cope, with all the appearance of accident, just to remember her very good friend by when miles and miles away. So nice of her!

The advent of a lady of position accompanied by two servants at the principal commercial hotel in Dudley was an event so unusual as to excite general surprise, for it was commonly accepted as beyond question that Dudley was not a summer resort for the opulent; and when after a light dinner about nine o'clock at night an order was given for a carriage to drive to Halesowen the humour of the situation was complete in the opinion of the chamber-maid and the boots, for assuming the outrage of any lady desiring to go to Halesowen at all, what could possibly have induced her to go at night and by way of Dudley.

But so it happened, and, with Jacobs the brother on the box and Jacobs the maid inside, the journey of inspection was begun. It was a dreary enterprise, but far from purposeless. Isabel's idea was to coerce Cope into co-operation with the army of defence, and inasmuch as every hour of Thresher's imprisonment was a pang to her, she resolved to hunt her husband down. Her purpose however was not easily carried out, for much to her annoyance and disappointment her way was stopped by a wildly excited crowd gathered round a burning building that none made even the slightest effort to save. It was Mr. Louison's model warehouse that had been prepared for firing, and was destroyed before it had been completed.

There was a good deal of tar about, provided for covering the iron work of the building, and the presence of the barrels had evidently suggested the act of the incendiary. The conflagration was in keeping with the rest of the scene; the flames were dulled by the all-pervading smoke which every now and then was lifted to show the havoc that the fire had made, and then it lowered again as if it were jealous of giving the miserable people the luxury of a spectacle. The coachman was for forcing his way through the crowd, but Isabel preferred first to see what was afoot.

Jacobs on the box reported the appearance of a little bent man on a tub gesticulating in the gloom to an angry mob. It

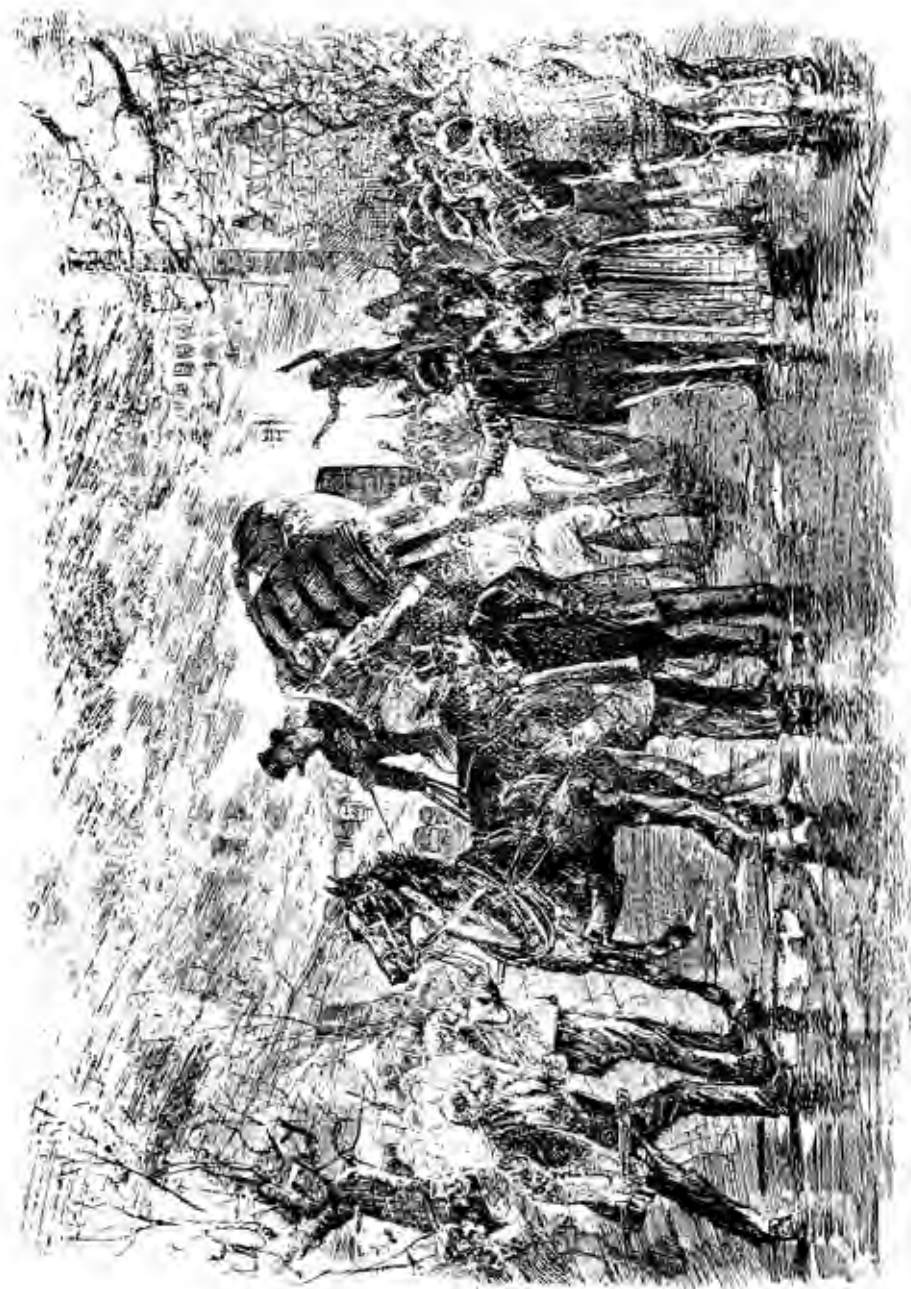
was Ebenezer Warp denouncing Cope as the incendiary. He had seen him near the place before the fire broke out, and he counselled retaliation with many imprecations of an apparently exhilarating character, and what was more alarming, with a distinct reference to the visitors in the carriage towards whom the entire mass of humanity moved with a settled purpose that there was no resisting.

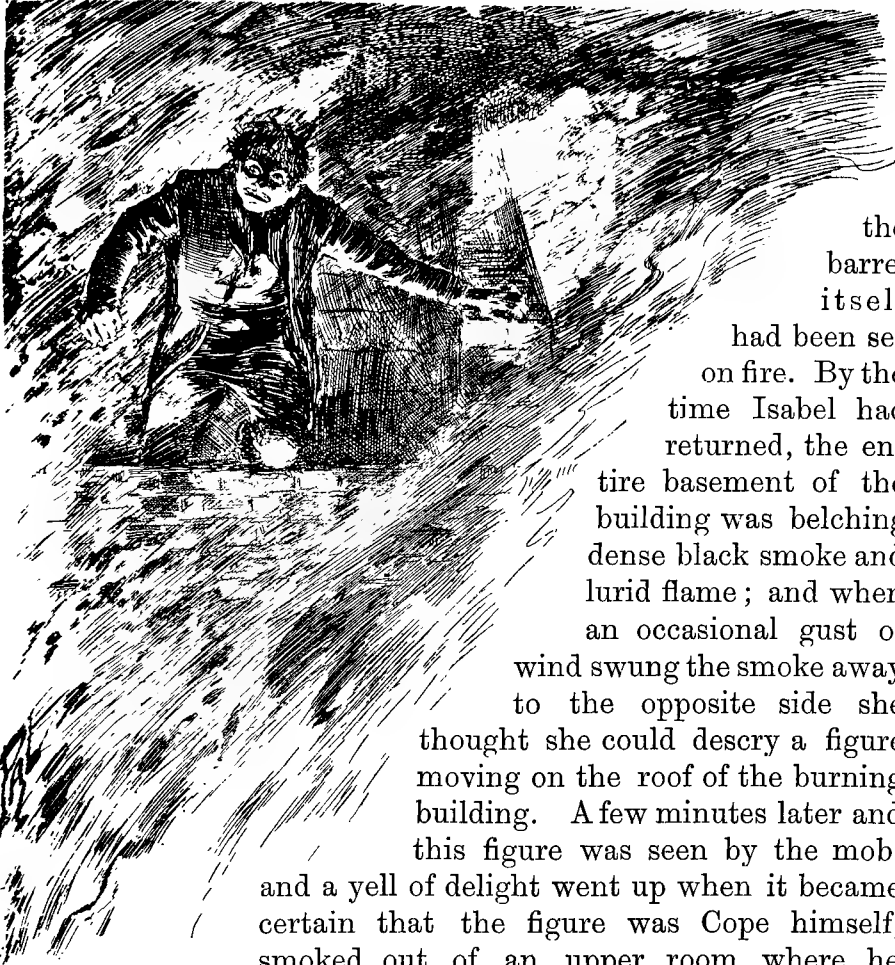
It appeared that the barrel from which old Ebenezer had been haranguing his friends was full of tar, and his scheme of dramatic justice was to use it to put Cope's warehouse in ruins. The presence of the carriage he regarded as providential, and its use was requisitioned to carry the barrel to the scene of action.

Isabel was naturally alarmed when she found herself surrounded by the mob. Their pinched faces and eager searching eyes would have startled anyone, and the growing darkness added to the threatening appearance of the crowd. Even the constantly repeated shouting of the stronger men that the ladies were not to be touched was not altogether reassuring because it indicated that mischief of some sort was brewing. There was however no means of resisting whatever might be determined, and in a very few minutes from the time Ebenezer left the tub it was swung on to the footboard and the horse was led by two of the men to see the driver did not carry off their prize.

In half-an-hour the mob had arrived at Cope's warehouse, the barrel was taken from the carriage, and a dozen or two of the more determined crowded round with grinning satisfaction to thank the ladies for their assistance. Some of them wanted to shake hands in token that there was no ill-feeling, but the hoarse-throated women pulled them back and the carriage passed on.

Sufficient had occurred to make Isabel curious as to how this strange incident would end, and after continuing the drive a short distance she stopped and finally returned to within a safe distance of the building that she afterwards learned was Cope's warehouse. There she was a witness to and practically a participator in a weird and terrible scene. The windows of the large room in the basement had been broken open, the contents of the tar barrel had been strewn about, the floor and





the barrel itself had been set on fire. By the time Isabel had returned, the entire basement of the building was belching dense black smoke and lurid flame; and when an occasional gust of wind swung the smoke away to the opposite side she thought she could descry a figure moving on the roof of the burning building. A few minutes later and this figure was seen by the mob, and a yell of delight went up when it became certain that the figure was Cope himself, smoked out of an upper room where he occasionally sought seclusion and a hammock. His position was perilous indeed. The staircase was burnt down, the first floor was filled with smoke and fire, and the attics alone were habitable. Cope was making an inspection of the roof, and although his movements seemed erratic and aimless, they were, as a matter of fact, eminently practical. It was clear to him that the mob expected him to be burnt alive, and it was equally clear that his fate would be scarcely improved by falling into their hands. He knew how the nailers hated him. He had spent half a lifetime in grinding gold out of them, and spurning them as they laid it at his feet. None knew better than he how sweet and terrible would be the retaliation when once an opportunity offered for

exacting it. Scheming his escape on the top of the house, he reasoned that the flames once passed, they would be evaded, but that his body would be as fuel to the passions of the mob. Harsh as was the alternative, he preferred to risk a fall upon a heap of broken iron in a roofless shed to being torn in pieces by the infuriated nailers. So he skirted his body with a blanket and wrapped another round his head. Over all he put a third, and, holding it down with his hands, coolly rolled over the parapet where the smoke was densest, and came with a crash and a bound into the middle of the shed where the crowd was unable to approach for the heat. There on the ground he lay disabled and stunned, but free from molestation.

So long as the flames continued to assert themselves the spirits of the crowd remained at fever heat, and yells of denunciation of Cope were frequent. That they could not see him was an additional incentive to their rage; but after giving vent to a wild shout of triumph as the roof fell in, their ardour cooled with the falling flames. They felt assured of the end of Cope, but their joy was the faint and fitful elation of gratified revenge; and as it spent itself they slunk away to their homes in groups of two and three, for with fatigue comes repentance.

There was not a doubt in the mind of Isabel but that Cope had perished in the flames, and the question with her was whether she should hasten back to Dudley for assistance, or direct Jacobs and the driver to make an examination in the bare hope of finding him still alive. She resolved on the latter course, but as there was no chance of entering the building while the ruins yet smouldered, the two men were unable to do more than make a tour of the outside, much of which was exposed to view from the roadway. Some parts of the rear of the building, however, were enclosed by the sheds, and in one of these was a heap of broken iron—pipes, girders and rails, boilers, geared wheels, and other elements of the ironmaster's scrap-heap, variously jagged, and the very reverse of a feather bed. Upon this lay the bundle of smouldering blankets which enclosed the form of Joshua Cope.

Notwithstanding its character, this fearful pile of broken iron was the only place Cope could have chosen for his fall so as to



be free both from the flames and the fury of the mob. The contents of the bundle were not in the least suspected by the two men, but on close inspection one of the old man's legs was descried with the trouser smouldering on it as he lay insensible even to the pain of seething flesh.

The blanket round his head was removed, and, finding he still breathed, they lifted him out into the open yard away from the heat of the building, and soon extinguished the burning clothes. The carriage being at hand, Isabel resolved to take him to Dudley. To assist in this, both she and her maid rode beside the driver, while Jacobs sat inside with his master, who reclined in the bottom of the carriage, with his head and shoulders resting against one of the doors. He remained insensible throughout the journey, and gave no sign of life even when lying on a bed on the first floor of the hotel—a miserable object with both arms fractured and both legs fearfully burnt, one of them being almost beyond recognition as a limb.

The local doctor recommended surgical aid ; and accordingly a surgeon of eminence was summoned. He came, accompanied by a nurse of superior muscular development, and of stern demeanour. The surgeon, who attributed his professional success to his artistic appearance and his melodramatic manner, for he was dressed like a Tyrolese minstrel and operated like a conjurer, was much distressed that his patient was insensible, and therefore could not see him. He dressed on the theory that a surgeon should excite the artistic instincts of his patient and thus distract him from the contemplation of his physical sufferings. But what was the use of a powerful physiognomy, a magnificent head of hair, and a Byronic collar if the patient were insensible. Dr. Prod gave expression to his annoyance by pronouncing it a hopeless case.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE TRIUMPH OF COPE.

HAVING responded to the dictates of an essentially human impulse in rescuing an old maimed man from a lingering death, Isabel began to reflect on the consequences of her action to herself. She was incapable of the daring hypocrisy of



asserting that Cope's recovery was a cherished hope with her, but candour also required of her the admission that she did actually desire his recovery in the interest of Thresher. She felt that he alone could provide the evidence to preserve the

life of Thresher, and that she alone possessed the lever wherewith to extract it from him. The life that was not desired for its own sake had become precious because she thought it necessary to preserve the life she valued; and although no motive of this kind could have controlled her in such a case, she reviewed the incident with much satisfaction because the thing it was right to do accorded so admirably with the thing that was desirable. If all moral impulse were so circumstanced virtue would be not only its own reward, but its own incentive.

Cope's view of the tender consideration shown to him would have been a study in villainy and chagrin if only he had known the facts; but he knew nothing, and thought of nothing on his awakening to consciousness but of the fact that he was really alive; and this he attributed wholly to the adroitness of his escape. His feelings formed another example of the blessings of ignorance, for an entire week passed before he knew even how he had been discovered.

At this time he was pretty much in the form of a mummy. Both his arms were in splinters, strapped to his sides; his legs were each a mass of cotton wool; and his face was haggard and marred by a large bruise on his cheek. His temper in these circumstances was execrable. Notwithstanding his age, it was his first illness; and he had come to regard his immunity from disaster as a part of the scheme of the Universe. Throughout life he had systematically accepted risks that should have shipwrecked him a hundred times; but he had always escaped, and with these escapes, which he persisted in regarding as the natural consequences of well-arranged schemes, he had acquired a spirit of boundless egotism. What he thought, what he schemed, what he wanted was right—incontestably right; and anything within the compass of the spheres that in any way conflicted with Joshua Cope's ambition was an error that the Universe was responsible for, and not Cope; and, as a logical consequence, the laws of the Universe had to give way in subjection to the purposes of the inexorable Cope.

So complete was his egotism, that he had never from the first the slightest anxiety concerning himself in connection with the Brighton affair. If anyone could have discussed the circumstances with him he would have scouted the suggestion

of risk. The possibility of failure had never entered his mind ; and the idea of his having been reduced to impotence by the action of the nailers excited within him only amazement and indignation. The fact that he had survived, which to an ordinary person would have been a cause of thankfulness, was to him merely an act of conciliation or repentance upon the part of Providence due to the genius of Cope.

It had been designed by Isabel that he should not be made aware of her intervention in the matter of his rescue ; but, unfortunately for her scheme, his man Jacobs was in the room when he regained consciousness. The mind, once awakened, was violently active ; and, finding himself a prisoner, he concentrated all the malice of his soul on the miserable Jacobs as representing not only himself but the Universe in general.

“What do you mean by this ?” he asked with oaths and imprecations. “This is a nice condition for me to be in. How did *you* get here ?”

The volley of oaths, as well as the suddenness of the onslaught, unnerved Jacobs, who said precisely the thing he should not.

“Mrs. Cope brought me,” said he.

“The devil !” exclaimed Cope, and incontinently fainted away.

When he again awoke to consciousness the nurse was alone with him, and a curious colloquy ensued. The professional eye remarked the awakening, but nothing was said. She left it to the patient to open the conversation ; and the patient considered for some time before commencing the attack.

“You’re a nurse,” he said.

“Yes, sir. I hope you’re feeling better.”

“Who engaged you ?”

“Mrs. Cope.”

“The devil,” he muttered, and then a grim smile came over his face, and he reflected. Presently he asked in a mild insinuating way :

“How did Mrs. Cope know I was ill ?”

“She found you.”

“Found me ?” ejaculated the old man.

“Yes ; but you’d better go to sleep now ”

‘No, I hadn’t better go to sleep. I’m not going to sleep, nor to anything until you tell me exactly how I come to be here ; so begin.’

The tone was violent if not loud, and the nurse concluded it was better to satisfy him. She told the story briefly, and the old man’s eye glistened with surprise as she described the accidental presence of Mrs. Cope on the scene. Then his face assumed an appearance of anger and malicious resolution. He made no comment, but his excitement was severe, and the nurse knew she had done wrong from the heavy drops of sweat that stood out on his forehead and the wild aspect of his eyes.

“Where is Mrs. Cope ?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” said the nurse ; “but you had better try to sleep a little.”

Quick as lightning came the rejoinder :

“You are lying. Tell me the truth.”

The command came with such decision that the nurse confessed her belief that Mrs. Cope was in the hotel.

“Of course she is. Get her here ! Quick !”

The nurse left the room, and considered the matter on the door-mat outside. The violent emotion of the patient must be allayed. Would the presence of Mrs. Cope allay or only aggravate it ? She consulted Mrs. Cope ; and Isabel, with an impetuosity that would have become a devoted wife, immediately responded to the request. The nurse thought it very natural.

“So I owe my present position to you, madam ?” he sneered.

Isabel assented, saying :

“I could do no less.”

“What ?” he shrieked. “She glories in it, the beldame.”

And then he set to work mumbling anathemas, and rolling his eyes in impotent rage in the firm belief that she had set the nailers on him. Presently his meaning began to dawn on her, but she repressed her indignation, and said :

“When you are calmer I have something to say to you.”

She would have left the room at once, but he instantly apprehended her purpose, and with his usual cunning changed his tone, and said :

“Now or never ; and quick.”

Isabel hesitated only a moment, and then said in a firm, bold voice :

"I came to seek you because David Thresher is charged with poisoning the servants in our house at Brighton, and —"

"He'll be hanged too ; the sooner the better."

"No," she exclaimed ; "he will not, because he is innocent."

"Innocent or guilty, he'll be hanged, and serve him right."

This was said with unusual vehemence and malignity, the more so as only the head of the speaker seemed to be alive ; but the response came with decision :

"No, he will not be hanged, and you will save him, because you know him to be innocent."

"I don't, and I won't, and I'd hang him myself if I could."

"Shall I speak more plainly ?" asked Isabel, impressively. She was leaning forward with her left hand on the back of a chair at some distance from the bed, and a slightly startled look came over the old man's face as she asked the question. He did not answer, but watched her keenly.

"I heard the man who did the deed enter the house that night," she continued, "and I saw him leave."

He winced, but merely said :

"Did you, and what of that ?"

"It was not David Thresher, and you know who it was."

"I don't ; you lie," he exclaimed savagely.

"You do know, and you will assist in procuring evidence to acquit my friend."

"I will not ; I'll die first. If he were only hanged I'd die happy. I hate him !"

Isabel did not move a muscle at the fearful imprecations that followed this declaration, but with the same firmness as had hitherto marked her manner she said :

"If you do not comply with my wish I propose to act myself. I leave here to-morrow afternoon. I shall send a message to you at noon."

"You needn't," said the head, writhing impotently, but with undisguised malice in every lineament of the face, "I have never changed my purpose and I never will."

Isabel was about to answer, when Cope suddenly exclaimed : "Wait !" in a tone that in some sort indicated repentance to the hearer ; and then he said :

"Bring in the nurse."

The nurse was waiting in the passage, and on her entering Cope said, looking at her appealingly :

"You are appointed by the doctor to attend on me."

"Yes, sir."

"It is your duty to see I am not injured by any one."

"Yes, sir."

"Then," he added, raising his voice almost to a scream, and speaking with marvellous rapidity, "See this woman off the premises within an hour. She's my wife, but she'll kill me. She's the paramour of the poisoner of the women at Brighton. She set my workpeople on to destroy me. She'll poison my food. Get her away, away, away."

As the nurse, impelled by professional obligation, led Isabel from the room, a ghastly smile and a devilish sparkle of the eye lit up his face—a gleeful transport at the success of his scheme. He was a cripple, he thought, but still triumphant.



CHAPTER XXXV

INTROSPECTION.

ISABEL had failed ; and but for the great passion of her life she would have despaired. The consciousness of her weakness in the presence of overpowering circumstances that threatened the life of her friend bewildered her and almost unnerved her. She had come to Cope with no definite purpose beyond procuring his co-operation through fear. He had responded by striking at her with reckless daring. He had shattered her hopes so effectually that she felt almost guilty of the crimes he imputed to her.

It would have been a time of weeping with most women, but Isabel did not weep. Introspection was her panacea for mental distress, but on this occasion it resulted in rebellion and resentment at what she conceived to be the injustice to which events had subjected her. Nothing that she had done could, in her opinion, legitimately result in the series of disasters that had befallen her. The indiscretion of Thresher's midnight visit curiously never struck her as an impropriety, and she had never until this moment traced any evil consequences to it. She had indeed always regarded it as an ordinary occurrence, and as in natural sequence to the deception which had been practised upon her by her father. Cope's denunciation of her, however, awakened new reflections, and although concern for her own reputation had hitherto been but a small factor in the case as it presented itself to her mind, she now regarded her position as exceedingly perilous, because it was not only dangerous to herself, but reacted on Thresher.

The words of Cope had fallen upon her as a succession of blows, and the only shield she could present against them—the flimsy gossamer of Cope's fears and apprehensions—had been worse than useless. She had provoked attack, and was utterly worsted.

Then followed a sense of extreme loneliness. She needed counsel, but to whom could she go? And if she found a

counsellor, what could she say ? The one great fact that formed the pivot of all her reasoning she dared not mention.

She called the nurse and enquired as to the situation. She was told that the gentleman was very light-headed and still "going on." The nurse thought my lady had best not see him again until after the doctor had called because she seemed to excite him, to which Isabel replied that she might tell her patient that she was leaving for London by the next train—a declaration that would have surprised the nurse if she had not put it down as a sick-room fiction contrived for the benefit of the patient. As a matter of fact, however, Isabel did go by the next train to London, and on reaching home sent for Mr. Ware, who gave the advice that every sensible man would have given in similar circumstances : to leave the matter in the hands of those to whom it was committed—an impotent conclusion, nevertheless, wholly unsuited to allay the eager spirit of a devoted woman.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE PRACTICE OF THE LAW.

THE gladiatorial displays of old Rome have their prototype to-day in the fashionable trial, which excites the brutal instincts of the spectator and gives pleasure in proportion to the danger or sufferings of the victim. Counsel, witnesses, and Court officials are each conscious of a histrionic disposition, when the gallery is crowded, and the gangways are choked with the striving populace; every interest has its representative at the entertainment, and, in some instances, not even the Judge upon the Bench is free from the vulgar passion for display.

The trial of David Thresher was a rare opportunity. He was not merely one of the better classes, which was in itself a ground for special interest, but he was handsome and he was regarded as an eccentric criminal; for of course he was guilty, else why was he in the dock. Opinion was divided as to the motive, for, although it was generally admitted he did not intend to poison the two women he had never seen or heard of, yet the popular voice inclined to the conclusion that his malice was directed to Isabel, who had jilted him, rather than towards Miss Winscomb whose death would not of necessity be to his advantage. The public was in fact very much of opinion that revenge rather than cupidity had controlled the interesting malefactor, and this belief made the situation all the more attractive. Jealousy and revenge are far more popular motives, dramatically regarded, than greed; and those who review public opinion would have said that the people decided on jealousy of Cope as the motive of the crime only because it was more agreeable to associate the incident with the grand passion than with one of a coarser type. The majority has always preferred melodrama.

Ignorance of the facts was of course at the bottom of this wrongheadedness; but facts, as a rule, are hard to get at, and the faculty of reasoning is not common enough to make it a matter of real importance to anyone whether the public has fact or fiction to deal with. The result would probably be

the same in either case. The public enjoys being wrong. It would never be enthusiastic about anything if it regarded accuracy; and if Society were denied its scandal, its lions, its private views, its dress rehearsals, and its popular trials, what would become of it? David Thresher was supplying a want, and had he known his duty to Society he would have been gratified.

The leading counsel for the prosecution was typical of the melodramatic bar. He was an eminent politician and a notorious bully. He had elbowed his way to the front by the insolent repression of ability that had not the good fortune to

be associated with presumption, and, since he fulfilled the first condition of the commercial aspect of the profession—that he won cases—he had come to be regarded as invulnerable, and in consequence a forensic star of the first magnitude. Thresher had the misfortune to be defended by a gentleman.



Isabel was very much alone in that seething throng. She sat in the gallery, having her friend, the prisoner, on her right, the judge on her left, and the jury opposite.

The bar was below briefed and briefless, and the press was there in a flood. All the descriptive men were there, contemptuous of fact as of shorthand, from excess of imagination and love of the picturesque. The general public was there in its thirst for excitement, and its passion for the study of the criminal law; and Society was there, on the bench by virtue of its political status, in the gallery by virtue of special orders, and in all the best places because it was "Society." All the conditions of the modern *gratis* show were complied with, and the most exacting could not have hoped for a more sensitive victim or more acute suffering on the part of those near to him, than was provided by these proceedings.

The Judge was, perhaps, the least influenced by the histrionic aspect of the display, but still he was human. He felt com-

plimented by the largeness of the gathering, and congratulated himself on his good fortune in being relieved of the monotony of *nisi prius* and being provided with a study in artistic crime. A man who could conceive of poisoning people with eggs he regarded with scientific interest, for one of his most cherished delusions was that he had early exhibited a genius for scientific research, and might have been a great discoverer in the realm of natural philosophy had not a perverse fate led him to the bar. A trial of this character was in the nature of a rare opportunity, and he entered upon it with zest. Thus it came to pass, that the entire company there gathered together were eminently pleased with themselves for being there, and had made up their minds for a day's rare enjoyment. Thresher and his immediate circle of friends must of course be excepted from the general; but they were only three, including Eales.

The trial was not a long one. Much time was spent in proving quite obvious facts from the necessity of getting put on record in due form the notorious as well as the novel. The position soon, however, looked black for Thresher. He had in his possession a key of the front door of the house at Brighton, and although it was explained that the lock on the house at Brighton was one of a series provided for the firm of Schrieber and Co., and that he had a key because he had been a partner, the fact remained that he had a key and could enter the house at will. "Moreover," demanded the prosecuting counsel, with a look of horror, "why had he not given up the key, when he ceased to be a partner of Schrieber & Co.?" It was true the lock had been put there by Mr. Foyle, to save him the trouble of carrying an extra key, and it was equally true that Thresher did not know he had the key to it, but this could not be proved, and was only suggested. How could anyone prove that a man does not know a thing? What could be and what was proved was that he had the key, and the key was shown and the lock too. It was not asking much of the jury to believe that a man who had a key should know it opened a given lock. It was not a very long step from the fact that the key was in his pocket to the belief that he had heard that one of the locks it opened was on the door of the house at Brighton. He had been a partner with Foyle, in daily communication, in

domestic relations, and peculiarly intimate. Surely it was easier to believe that he knew about the Brighton lock than that he did not. The key was a very sad business for Thresher.

Then he had some white plaster in his house, bought, so they said, for mending a curio. The experts revelled in this white plaster for a long time. One set declared that it was identical with that found in the eggs, and another set were equally confident of the reverse. The natural tendency of the human mind was to go with the former set. White plaster is white plaster, and the possession of it shows it could have been used for manipulating the eggs, and this also is a short step from the conviction that it was so used.

But he was seen—seen issuing from the house at Brighton, of which he had the key, at two in the morning or later, by the policeman on the beat, on the very night before the women were poisoned. That was a damning fact, not capable of refutation, nor even of dispute. What business had he there, and by what right was he in a house not his own, and without the knowledge of its owner? Thus reasoned the triumphant extractor of verdicts, and so winced the friends of Thresher. This was unanswerable. There was no *alibi*. Thresher, all admitted, was in Brighton that night, and he left the next day, not actually in haste, but having given no sign of an intended departure until that day.

Moreover, he gave no explanation of his movements that night; but if he did not, others did. He was admitted to his hotel between two and three in the morning by the night porter, and he had not been seen by any of the hotel servants from half-past ten on that same night until he returned. This was all in perfect confirmation of the statement of the constable, and none could doubt that Thresher was there. The policeman might have been deceived in the darkness as to his identity, but the night porter of the hotel could not be mistaken. Thresher was well-known to him, and he addressed him by name when he let him in. Apart from the main incidents, and the associated facts, there was nothing extraordinary in his late return. There might have been a hundred causes for absence, all natural and even commonplace—an argument with a

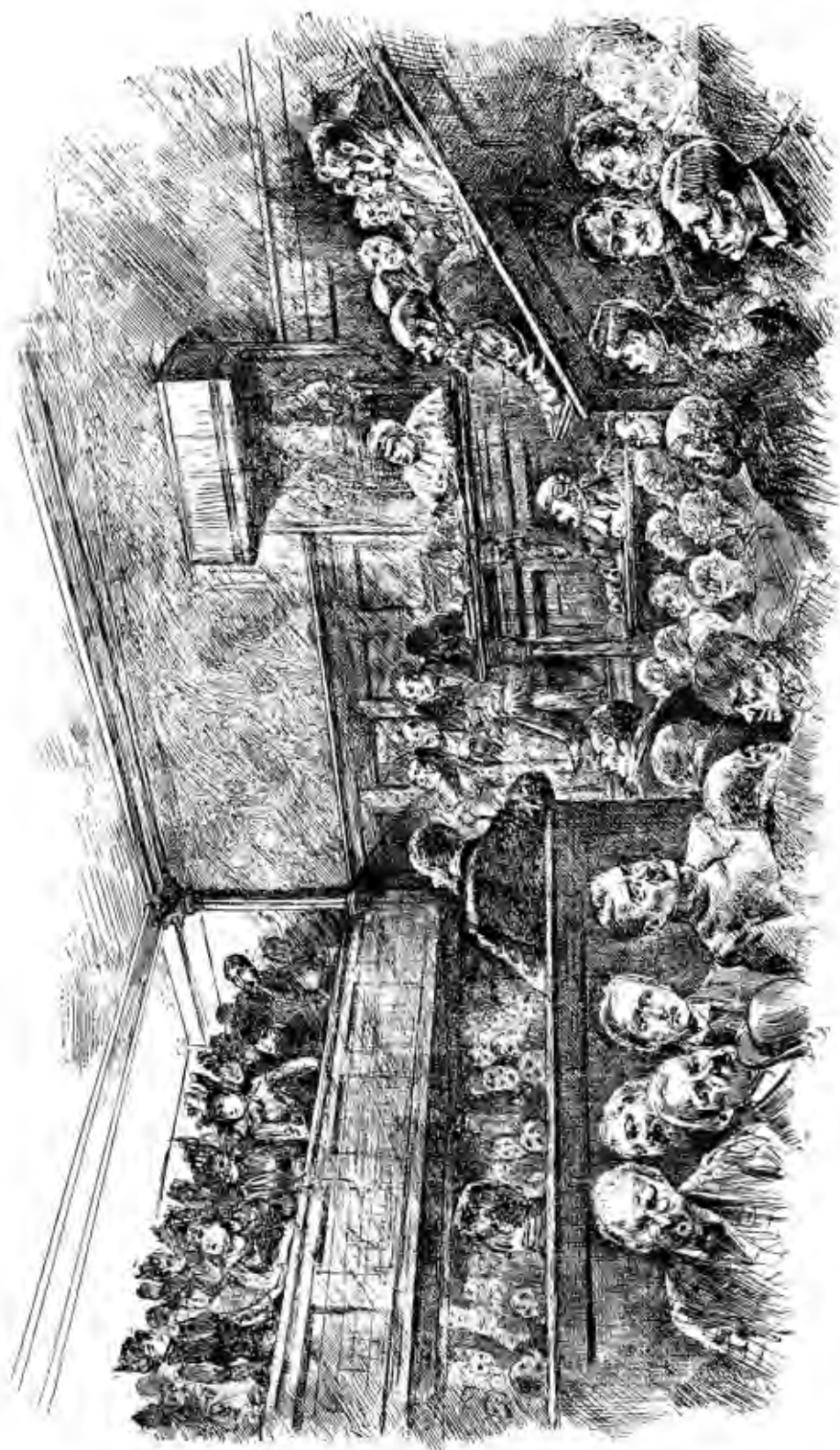
friend, a game at billiards, a late supper ; but there stood Thresher, and none of these possibilities were even hinted at, much less proved.

No one but the policeman and the night porter were found to say where he was on that fearful night, and their statements, simple as they were, rang like a death-knell in Isabel's ears. Dizzy and blinded with emotion the Court swung round and round with her, and her heart seemed to stop. Then came the mental effort and a straining wrench of the rail in front of her, the sickening revulsion that comes with reviving power, and then she breathed again to think and nerve herself to reconstrue the situation.

The brutal energy of the prosecuting counsel acted as a tonic with her, for anger is ever a better taskmaster than love. The distinguished counsel revelled with ghoulis satisfaction in the completeness of the meshes he had woven round his victim. If the crowning joy of his life had been to prepare subjects for the hangman he could not have dwelt with more enthusiasm upon the petty incidents that, pieced together, spelt scaffold at every turn. Thresher's presence at Brighton, and in the house, was the clinching fact to which he reverted time after time at the end of every period of constructive comment ; but his method awakened in the heart of Isabel a passionate hatred, with which pride had something to do ; for, in the course of his headlong declaration, he offered an alternative of two motives to the jury, one of prospective gain through the death of Miss Winscomb, and the other of revenge through the death of herself ; and he dwelt upon the probabilities in each case with a minuteness and a callous disregard of the possibility of the actual truth that was positively maddening.

Isabel had her revenge. She did not reason as to her course but, intuitively, she rushed to a conclusion. Immediately her enemy had sat down, eminently gratified with his own performance, and whilst the ushers were silencing the cheers of his delighted audience, she rose in the gallery, and in a voice clear as a bell and rich in volume, she exclaimed :

“ My lord, I know something of this matter that should be spoken.”



And there she stood, calm and erect, unveiled, and with her pale face bent eagerly towards the judge as she broke the silence that ensued.

“I appeal to you, my lord, to hear me.”

The judge was annoyed. Nothing annoys a judge more than an irregularity, and here was a most improper intervention of an utter stranger in a case of the first importance at a point when everything connected with it was closing up in a decent, orderly and regular manner. He had cause to be annoyed; but he looked at Isabel as she stood before him, and he looked long before he spoke. Everybody in Court looked. He shuffled his notes about and reflected, had another look, and then asked:

“Do you know this per—this lady, Mr. Attorney?”

“No, my lord,” said the prosecuting counsel, savagely. He guessed there was something afoot adverse to his cause.

“Nor you, Sir Henry?” enquired the judge of the defending counsel.

“Yes, my lord,” was the reply. “This is Mrs. Cope, of whom we have heard in this case.”

“Do you know what she has to say?”

He did not, but knowing he had no case, and thinking that, while it could not be made worse, it might be made better, he expressed the opinion that in the interest of justice she should be heard. The jury all eagerly supported this deliverance, and the entire Court would have applauded if it had dared. The judge hesitated. It was most irregular—not unprecedented, but irregular. He hesitated still more, and before he had determined on a course, the rich full voice burst upon the Court again:

“My lord, he came to the house that fatal night, on my invitation, and I let him in. While there with me another entered the house secretly, and left after ten minutes’ stay. My friend, whom you are trying, is innocent of all this crime. I swear it.”

The silence was appalling. The sensation was exquisite, and the situation the choicest of the season. Society was abundantly gratified.

The perplexity of the judge increased. A statement had been made, and whatever he or anyone else might say it would weigh with the jury. He did not wish that it should

weigh, for he was annoyed at an interruption that he dared not ignore. The practice of the Court had been outraged. The result of much solemn consultation and headshaking was that Mrs. Cope was sworn and repeated her statement with a view to cross-examination, for the counsel for the defence asked no questions. He was content with the statement as it stood.

Then the eminent and popular counsel for the prosecution assumed his most impressive mien. He did not look at Isabel as he addressed her, but stared fixedly at a blank space high



up on the wall of the Court. He had small grey eyes, no eyebrows, a large shapeless nose, and a mouth with thin, colourless, dry lips, that he was accustomed to purse up with many creases. But although he asked his questions, staring at the wall, he turned his eyes suddenly on the witness as he waited for the answer, with a good deal of the cobra in his manner. This was the way it ran:—

“You are a married woman?”

“I have contracted a marriage engagement.”

“Then you are married; yes or no?”

“Conventionally: yes.”

“Construe what you mean by ‘conventionally’?”

“I attended a Registrar’s Office, and signed a record of marriage.”

“That is unconventional,” remarked the counsel, highly gratified at his smartness. “We’ll let that pass. You are married to Mr. Cope, eh?”

“Unfortunately, yes.”

“Why unfortunately?”

“I was deceived and betrayed into the marriage by falsehood and fraud.”

Society was in the seventh heaven.

"Who betrayed you?"

No answer.

"Who betrayed you, I say?"

"My father," came the answer, in low and melancholy tones.

The eminent counsel did not like this answer. It awakened recollections of a little domestic incident associated with a hoped for marriage then being worked out at home, and the answer made him angry.

"You would have preferred the prisoner?"

"I was engaged to him, and would have married him."

"You therefore thought it proper to receive him at midnight in your husband's absence?"

"No, I did not."

"Then why did you receive him, at midnight, in your husband's absence?"

"Because a parting interview was necessary to explain my act."

"At midnight?"

"Yes, at midnight. I had prying friends about me."

At this answer a little scream was heard in the gallery, and Society discovered that Lady Arabella was among them, veiled and in the third row.

"You thought that because you had assented to a marriage your father had proposed to you, you were entitled to receive an old lover at midnight, in the absence of your lawful husband, to exchange explanations. Is that your answer?"

"Yes. It was on such an understanding."

"Never mind your understanding. We only want your idea of marital propriety. Now, tell me this. You have said that when the prisoner was with you making these explana-



tions and so forth, you heard someone enter the house with a key. Is that so?"

"Yes."

"That you then waited for ten minutes in silence—no further explanations going on—and then the intruder left the house, as he came. Is that so?"

"Yes."

"You saw him from the window?"

"Yes."

"He crossed the street?"

"Yes."

"Who was he?"

This question came suddenly as the crack of a whip, but there was no answer, and the eminent counsel felt proud.

"Come, Mrs. Cope; you saw him. Who was he?"

Still there was no answer.

"You had a good look at him, Mrs. Cope, you know. He crossed the road, and stood looking at the house from the other side before he went away. Did you recognise him?"

Still there was no answer, and the judge awoke to the situation.

"You must answer that question, Madam, for you must know whether you recognised the person or not."

"My lord, I should not answer it."

"Indeed, and why should you not?" exclaimed the judge.

"Because I am not sure, and being not sure, if I named a person I might do him a grave injustice."

"Then your answer is," said the judge, "that you did not recognise the person, but thought he resembled some one of your acquaintance."

"Yes."

Then came a long wrangle about the name, and as to whether Isabel should be compelled to divulge it. Ultimately, it was agreed that it should be written down and handed to the judge. Isabel complied, but folded the paper twice before handing it to the court usher, and as the judge received it, she said:

"My lord, the responsibility is with you;" and then heaving a deep sigh, she seemed to be losing somewhat of her composure. The strain was becoming severe.

There was just the suspicion of a grim smile upon the features of the judge, as he read the name of Joshua Cope on the paper, followed by a glance of surprise at Isabel, and then he folded the paper up again and pondered.

"I am considering, Mr. Attorney," said he, "whether this name should go any further. I am certainly of opinion that it should not go beyond the counsel in the case."

"As your lordship pleases," was the response, and the paper was handed down.

The feelings of Society and the press may be imagined as the paper was unfolded and read. In each case the reading was followed by an involuntary glance at Isabel—a surprised look, not unmingled with admiration. It was evident that neither the judge nor the counsel believed her story, but they thought it a most ingenious conception; and he for the defence, as in duty bound, took it the more seriously.

Society relied on the press for the contents of the paper, and the press was at its wits end devising schemes to procure it, but as each representative played for his own hand, no sign was given, and one at least chuckled at the idea, of his being safe for the prize, on the basis of a political affinity between his paper and the popular advocate, who owed much to democratic advocacy, and was a profound believer in conciliation. Holding a candle to the devil was a familiar act with him. He owed much to Society also, and the idea occurred to him that Society might be gratified by the publication of that name, which, in any case, he was resolved the jury should know, because he foresaw an excellent opportunity of turning the whole incident to account with them. So, said he :

"My lord, your lordship cannot fail to have remarked upon the important light this name throws on all that this witness has said; and I must ask you in the interest of justice to reconsider your determination to withhold it from the jury. Before, however, asking for your decision, I propose to ask one question."

The judge assented, and the cross-examination proceeded.

"Now, Mrs. Cope, you have told us that you preferred not to mention the name of this person, who, you say, entered and left the house while the prisoner was with you, because you

might be wrong. Now, will you swear you cannot make up your mind whether you recognised him or not?"

There was marked hesitation—wavering—a strong effort, and again clear self-possession, as she said:

"I believe it was he, but it was dark."

"Now, my lord," exclaimed the counsel, with an outburst of impetuosity, "I ask that that name be handed to the jury."

He had got exactly what he wanted, and while those who listened were with few exceptions unable to follow him, the air of savage triumph with which he demanded the publication of the name attracted the sympathy of the audience, and gave the key to his public successes. He drove with brutal energy to the objective point, sparing none, and absolutely reckless of everything but the purpose of the moment. The judge was as a feather in the wind, and Society was duly informed that it was her husband that she had named.

Isabel, speaking as she did with simple truth, save only that she had no doubt whatever but that the visitor was Cope, was wholly unconscious of the use her statement would be put to, and had no conception of the aspect in which she would be regarded on the morrow by ninety-nine out of every hundred of the population. She had desired not to be an accuser of the man who happened to be her husband. She shrank from assuming a vindictive part; and thus she hesitated and threw a doubt on what, in other circumstances, would have been avowed without a thought. But the popular counsel had not done with her.

"Where is your husband?"

"At Dudley."

"What is he doing there?"

"He is ill."

"How ill?"

"He has his arms broken from an accident."

"How did that happen?"

"He fell from a burning warehouse."

"How did it come to be burning?"

"It was fired by the mob."

"Were you there?"

"Yes."

“ When did you reach Dudley ? ”

“ That afternoon.”

“ That will do,” said the counsel, and sat down, very much satisfied with himself indeed. He had achieved a distinct triumph, in a very difficult position. He had traded on the preference mankind has to believe evil, and had succeeded beyond imagination.

The defence was hopeless. What to the simple mind of Isabel was a complete answer to the accusations made against her friend had been turned into a most fearful condemnation of herself. Even as she left the witness-box she had no apprehension of the terrible consequences to herself of the declaration she had made ; still less of the confirmation she had given to the charge against her friend. She understood it later, when the jury was told that her story was an obvious fabrication conceived in the hope of weaving a halter for her husband’s neck that she might be free to marry her lover. The infamy of the suggested motive appalled her. She listened, almost unmoved at the accusation that the same motive accounted for her presence at Dudley and the action of the incendiaries. The words of Cope, in his sick room, flung at her with maledictions, returned to her, and she recognised at once the origin of her new misfortunes, and the error she had made. She was dumb with horror, and fled from the Court with the perfect certainty that all was lost. She was in no degree surprised, when three hours later, the news was brought to her that David Thresher was condemned to death. It was balm to her, when, later in the day, she heard that his only comment on her action was :

“ What a fearful sacrifice ! Dishonoured for nothing, and worse than nothing ! ”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

GENERAL AND PARTICULAR.

THE floodgates of popular opinion were opened up on the morrow of the trial. The British jury in the person of the entire British nation tried the case on appeal, zealously assisted by the press, which started any number of contradictory theories to their universal confusion. There was, however, little difference of opinion on one point. Nobody seemed to believe in Mrs. Cope's other man, excepting one journalist who had made a school of social thought based on the assumption that no woman was ever wrong, but always wronged, and that he and his devotees were alone pure among men. These accepted Mrs. Cope's other man as the only intelligible explanation of the mysteries of the case, and the fact that they did accept it and advocate it was a great misfortune for Isabel and Thresher and all their friends, because there is nothing that tells so much against one in this world as the support of a discredited advocate. But so it was, and the more this immaculate journalist worked his theories the more the cynics smiled and turned to other things. This inveterate person, however, was rather unhappy over one point. Mrs. Cope had disappeared, and was nowhere to be seen or heard of. He wanted to interview her, but she was gone. He had printed her portrait. That was easy, because it was on sale, along with the Bishops and notorious ladies of the ballet, the prominent statesmen and the ladies of title who had also a reputation for beauty. Mrs. Cope's portrait had become a rage; but it was common. Everybody knew what Mrs. Cope was like, but she had never been interviewed, and what every journalist wants is something that nobody else has got or can get. That's why so many of them print what is not true. It is hardly in accordance with the fitness of things that because a lady in painful circumstances chooses to retire into privacy she should be discredited; but so it was, and by not permitting herself to be interviewed she lost the energetic advocacy of the purist journalist who one fine day started an entirely new

legend. Mrs. Cope, he announced with much circumstance and carefully contrived innuendo, was being sought for by the police and could nowhere be found. This was followed by mention of a possible respite in view of the trial of another. The language used was obscure, but sufficient to induce the suggestion that Isabel was an accomplice, if not the only criminal. If that did not bring her out of hiding to be interviewed nothing would. As she did not come it may be presumed that no product of a prurient imagination was equal to the task of stirring her to a sense of her obligation to an energetic press.

Failing Mrs. Cope they besought her father, and Mr. Crawley Foyle was only too happy. It afforded him an opportunity he had been looking for to publicly announce "his discarding of the entire circle." He renounced his daughter, renounced Thresher, renounced everybody except Cope—the injured Cope; and Arthur joined him in the general renunciation for a very potent reason. He had got into a very bad corner and Cope was his only chance of getting out with a whole skin. He had begun to revere Cope, and wondered how it was he never got into bad corners. Cope once said in his hearing that he supposed he was not cleverer than other people; that he only saw a little further, which Arthur Foyle thought a ridiculous excess of modesty on Cope's part, and then went home and bit his nails in anger because he could not see as far as Cope. In this way it came to pass that Cope recruited the father and the brother on his side and so helped justice further on the road astray.

Cope, still bound hand and foot, was in an ecstasy at the situation, and had all the newspapers read to him all day long, some of them twice over, they said such disagreeable things about his wife. One of them tickled him immensely by working out the idea that the poison had been intended by the two lovers for himself. This theorist had imported into his argument the entirely new fact that Cope had intended visiting Brighton the very day of the death, and had been prevented by an unexpected piece of business. He had the article cut out and pasted on a card that he might read it himself—it pleased him so much, and he alternated the reading of it with other special gems of thought of the same character. He

suffered no interruption of this pastime except a visit from Shorter, and occasionally he vented an outburst of imprecation when by chance a sympathetic chord was struck at variance with his views, for there were a few—a very few—who by a process of abstract reasoning declined to admit the possibility of a heinous crime without the appropriate seed and soil.

But almost all the forces that controlled the movement of the social life were dead against the wretched man, who looked to death as a relief from what had come to be a world of hopeless misery for him ; for what could wealth or faithful friends do for one saturated with the recollection of the hollowness, unsoundness, and determined error of the public mind and of the impotence of man against a combination of adverse facts that the Omniscient alone could construe in the absence of the hidden key ; and this was Cope's secret. Thresher became a fatalist as he brooded in his condemned cell. It is thus he reasoned that men and women win or lose, prosper or decay, not as they design nor as they work ; nor are they helped by others or thrown back from motives pertinent to the matter of their lives ; but here and there a blow is struck or a helping hand is given, because another with another purpose striving on another mission thinks the act will serve him in that other mission, reckless of the good or harm his selfish act may do. His misery was complete, for he had cherished ambitions for the good of his fellow men and his arm had been paralyzed as if by a lightning stroke. A victim of falsehood, fraud, and the crimes of others may surely be excused a feeling of satisfaction at the approach of death save only that the end was associated with dishonour.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SILAS W. OMAH ARRIVES.

THE disappearance of Mrs. Cope from the public eye was another of Mr Louison's triumphs. It was natural that Isabel should have sought a refuge in Maida Lodge ; and it delighted Mr. Louison to know that the seclusion it afforded could be put to so good a purpose. Jacobs and her mistress entered Maida Lodge at night by the wall that had not opened since Thresher's departure to give himself up to the police. They arrived late on the night of the trial, and it pleased the old man to leave them in almost exclusive possession of the wing that he formerly appropriated to his own use.

Most sensible people applauded Isabel's seclusion, even the cynical said it was another mark of her cleverness, and Mr. Ware, her ever faithful counsellor, commended it as an act of wisdom.

Consequent upon the retirement of Mrs. Cope the house in Park Lane was given up. The personal effects of Isabel were packed and stored, and those of Cope, being very few, were sent by train to Dudley. Their arrival at the Hotel caused him some thought, which he concluded with a sardonic grin and the remark :

"Close of the account ! He'll be hanged next week, and then I shall have a receipt in full."

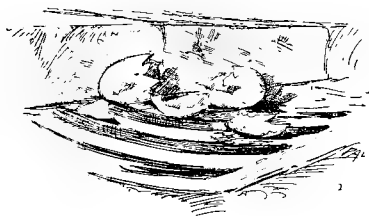
Cope's exultation would have been vastly increased if he could have had ocular demonstration of the concern of his opponents. There was much to plan and to do, for hope had not wholly deserted them. The lawyers were the less sanguine, because they appreciated more accurately the difficulties in the path they each and all resolved in their secret hearts to go ; but although the lawyers were less sanguine, they knew the road better, and happily for all concerned no doubt existed in the minds of any of the four of the singleness of purpose of the rest.

The counsels were many and prolonged. Eales practically regulated them ; and once or twice his rigid guidance

gave rise to remonstrance on the ground of lack of zeal. But there was exceedingly little to work on—practically nothing.

There was no longer any need of reticence on Isabel's part. She could declare now, without fear of misconception among her friends, that she had no doubt whatever as to who was the visitor who entered the house at Brighton while Thresher was with her. It was Cope, and no other than Cope. His figure, his walk, his manner, his clothes were all too vividly present to her mind—had been too forcibly impressed there to admit of a single doubt. Her hesitation and expressed fear of error had been dictated only by the knowledge that her motive might be misconstrued. Unhappily that caution had told against her, for her hesitation had been construed as an avoidance of actual perjury. That, in the light of succeeding events, was construed as a distinct blot in the case; but how would a bold and open declaration unequivocal and immediate, have been construed, in the absence of any evidence to show that Cope had left Halesowen during that night. Of this there was none. It could merely be said there were trains he could have caught; but as matters stood, he was believed to have slept in his warehouse, huddled in his hammock, on the night he was seen by Isabel; and none but Isabel could be found to say they had seen him, from three o'clock the afternoon before until noon the next day, on any part of the route or anywhere at all.

The negation was valuable, but wholly insufficient, and, despite all search, nothing more could be made of it. One new fact had been gathered, but that it was deemed prudent to conceal. Some egg shells had been found lodged in a street drain at Brighton, of an apparent age corresponding with those



that had been removed from Miss Winscomb's house. The eggs had been apparently broken upon the grating, and had been partly forced through into the drain which was on the road from the house to Thresher's hotel. Obviously nothing

could be made of this by his friends. Wild schemes of going to the Queen were discussed and were gradually pared down to the

meagre aspect of a visit to the Home Secretary, and then abandoned in the absence of support from the Judge. The prospect was black indeed.

Matters were at this pass within a week of the day fixed for the execution when Cheriton answered a timid knock at the front door of Maida Lodge. It was Slipper, the disreputable-looking clerk to Mr. Eales, who had brought a stranger with him anxious to see his master. The stranger was tall and dark, with black curly hair and black eyes that glistened. He was decidedly handsome, but careless about his appearance, and evidently a pushing man, for he soon supplanted Slipper in the conduct of his mission.



"I've come, my friend," said he to Cheriton, with a hoarse voice, for he had a bad cold, "from the United States to see Mr. Eales, and I want to go back as soon as possible. Can I see him now?"

Cheriton said he would find out, and took the stranger's card, which bore upon it,

"Silas W. Omah,

"Lawyer,

"Topeka, Kansas, U.S."

The stranger and Slipper followed Cheriton to the upper vestibule, and, looking around, the American gave expression in slow and measured tones to his views.

"My friend," said he, "this is a grand old house. We don't grow 'em like this in Kansas *yet*. This is a house that seems to have been going on some time. It's solid and is calculated to make a man feel comfortable and established when he looks around. There's a good deal in your country, my friend, of this sort of thing to be proud of, because you can't buy it. You must grow it."

Slipper turned his active eye upon the stranger, wreathed a timid smile among the grime on his face, and muttered in guttural tones:

"Real property."

"Quite so," said the stranger, "This country *is* real. It's all wood. You're a sight too solid and comfortable, and that's why you're so darned hard to get set agoing."

Slipper did his best to straighten himself up for the honour of his country, and feeling a response was necessary, also for the honour of the country, said with more vigour than usual :

"It's safer."

"No doubt," said the American, "safer, quieter, easier, but it ain't inspiritin' "

At this point Eales appeared, and enquired his business.

"My business is very simple, sir," said the American, addressing Eales. "I have come from the States for a client of mine to see Mr. Joshua Cope, and I don't want to trouble you further than to let me know where I can come along with him. I see by the papers you have had some business with him. Isn't that so?"

"Yes," said Eales, cautiously ; "I have relations with him ; I am not instructed to ask your business, but I should be glad to assist you."

"No, *sir*," said the American, promptly. "You cannot have been instructed, because Mr. Cope doesn't know I'm coming to see him. If my interview doesn't pan out, I'll come back and see you."

Eales had no alternative. He gave the address and stated the condition of the old reprobate. The information had a striking effect upon the American, who, however, avoided any open mark of concern, and would have wound up the interview by expressing his obligations, but Eales continued by asking a question of much moment to his friends :

"You have not come on any mission," said he, "connected with a recent trial in which Mrs. Cope, his wife, has appeared ? Eh ?"

"No, *sir* ; my business is quite private with Mr. Cope. I shall be glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Eales, if my business with Mr. Cope enables me to return to you. Good morning, *sir*."

The American left the house with Slipper and renewed the conversation which Eales had interrupted. He continued to lavish compliments on the institutions of the country, and

Slipper rose to the situation as far as he was able. Although his answers were monosyllabic, they were very much to the point, and the American not only accepted them, but in some cases expanded and embellished them. Slipper was elated with a feeling of national pride, and for the first time in his life experienced dissatisfaction with the state of his boots. He felt they were unbecoming in themselves, and in no sense fit for the representative of the British nation ; but he shamled along by the side of the tall stranger and tried to forget his personal shortcomings in his pride of nationality.

"Say, friend," said Silas W Omah, "where can I get a long drink? You would like a long drink. That's so?"

A smile of daring, qualified by sickly doubt, broke over Slipper's face. Then, turning full round to bring his right eye upon his companion, he asked :

"American drinks?"

"No, sir, British. What is your particular, Mr. Slipper?"

"Gin," was the reply.

"Then you shall have gin ; and I, well, I, my friend, will have what we are unable to get on the other side with that perfection to which you, my friend, attain—brandy—old brandy."

The Kansas lawyer uttered this with an air of triumph, and Slipper, quickening his pace, led his companion down a narrow turning and into a very humble-looking public-house known as the "Black Bull," much frequented by the inhabitants of a neighbouring mews, and directed by a landlady of unimpeachable integrity. Slipper knew the place well ; it was the hostelry to which he had recourse on the greater occasions of his life, among which he accounted this as one. He introduced the American with confidence, and when they were seated in the tap-room with their glasses he waited with calm expectation for more compliments.

"Now, say, Mr. Slipper," said the American, with his arms folded across his chest, and his legs stretched out in front of him ; "Do you really think, now, that Mr. Eales actually expected me to tell him my business with Mr. Cope?"

"Yes."

The American brought himself up suddenly, and faced round to Slipper as if he had been struck. Leaning over the table, he exclaimed :

“ You surprise me.”

Not being provided with a satisfactory response, Slipper buried his nose in his tumbler, and setting the glass down, coughed.

“ You see,” said Silas W Omah, with increasing earnestness, “ I don’t *know* Cope.”

Slipper still did not see his way to a remark, and coughed again.

“ Now, what sort of a man *is* Cope ? ” asked the American.

Slipper shook his head, put on a grim smile, and said :

“ Queer.”

“ Plenty of money ? ”

“ Heaps.”

“ Good man of business ? ”

“ Tremendous.”

“ And what has he to do with friend Eales ? ”

Slipper this time gave a little nervous cough, and, Omah noticing that the glass had been emptied, drained his own, and ordered duplicates. Then Slipper ventured his arms on the table, and said in a hoarse whisper :

“ Eales and me manage the Tontine that Cope’s a member of.”

“ The devil you do,” exclaimed the American. “ Give me your hand on that. I’ve business with Cope, and you just make me feel real good when you say he’s wealthy and full of beans. You think he’ll win, eh ? ”

Slipper shook his head, and grinned.

“ Fairish chance,” said he ; but no questioning would induce him to go further in his opinion ; and after some general conversation, an examination of the time-table, and deliverance of Slipper’s views as to the route, the two parted.

Omah was in Dudley that night sleeping within a few rooms of Joshua Cope, who was still engaged in the pleasurable contemplation of Thresher’s misfortunes and Mrs. Cope’s discomfiture. The American seemed to be in no great haste, breakfasted late, and perambulated the hotel listlessly. He had observed the nurse, noted the room of the

invalid, and finally resolved upon action. He commenced with the waiter when taking lunch.

Said he :

"There's somebody up stairs seems to be pretty bad, James, eh?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Cope burnt in the fire; very bad, sir. Mr. Cope'll never walk about any more, sir, except with a crutch."

"You don't say. Well, that's cruel," said the sympathetic Omah. "And there's a nurse attending him."

"Two nurses."

"Not both on duty?"

"No, sir; one by day and t'other by night."

"They lift him about, I suppose."

"He can't move himself, anyways," said James.

"You don't say. Now, that is cruel. I suppose, James, if you was to go into his room and call him names, he wouldn't get up to punch your head?"

James grinned, and presently the American added :

"People hereabout don't seem over sorry for him. He wasn't too popular."

James regarded a dish of potatoes in his hand with a malevolent countenance and shook them about as he ejaculated,

"Popular? Likely! Not the sort," and various other satirical comments indicative of Cope's standing and reputation.

Omah's next proceeding was to waylay Mrs. Betts, the nurse, in the corridor, and said he :

"My good lady, you see before you a very unfortunate young man. I've come all the way from the United States to see Mr. Cope for one minute and three-quarters, and now I find he's very ill. I want to see him for just one minute and three-quarters, and then I go straight back to the States—right away after that one minute and three-quarters.

Mrs. Betts looked grave, said she was very sorry, quoted the doctor's orders : perfect quiet and no visitors.

"My good lady, you're a model nurse. You're going on a little errand I suppose. Chicken broth, eh? Now would you just put this little coin into your reticule in acknowledgment of your care and attention in the case of my dear friend Cope ;

and if you can arrange anything for me send word to number twenty-seven. Just one minute and three-quarters, Mrs. Betts—no more.”

Mrs. Betts said she would think about it. The American watched her down the corridor, and the moment after she had disappeared he walked into the invalid’s room unannounced.

“Well, Abe Shorrocks, my friend, it’s a long time since we met.”

The head lying on the pillow gave as it were a leap, and ejaculated :

“We’ve never met : who are you ?”

“Sir,” was the response, with an air of offended dignity “My name is Silas W Omah,” and here the tall American stopped to gauge the effect. He was not disappointed with the sudden jerk the head made as it lay on the pillow, and then he said :

“Lawyer of Topeka, Kansas ; son of Ozias Omah, of Massachusetts, and *once* of New York city, *sir* ”

The yellow and somewhat parched and crinkled visage, ill-shaven, and hollow-eyed lay stolid and unmoved, but obviously impressed at the words. Being addressed as “Shorrocks” had troubled him, but the name of Ozias Omah reduced the yellow to a pallid hue.

“What do you want with me ?” asked the head.

“I’ve come,” said the imperturbable Silas W Omah, “to revive a family association. That—is—all.”

“Then you’ve come to the wrong man,” said Cope, nervously.

“No, *sir*. You’re Shorrocks, and I’m right. I’ve not come from Topeka, Kansas, straight here without knowing my man. No, *sir* ”

“What do you want with Shorrocks ?” asked Cope.

“I want Shorrocks, meaning you, my friend, in connection with a little partnership account of long standing, and which to all appearances has prospered in the matter of dollars ; and my client, who happens to be my father, would like his share.”

The head rocked to and fro in token of dissent, but there was no answer.

"You don't appear to be well; I don't want to inconvenience you, but I must get back home pretty smart, and I must have a settlement."

"I'm very ill," groaned Cope, who looked far worse than he was. "I shan't live a day if I'm worried, they say. My feet burnt off and my arms both broken."

"And a nasty gash on the face," added the American, referring to the scar.

"No," said Cope sharply. "That's old, fifty years old—a sabre cut."

The American grinned, and leaning over the patient took a near look at it. Then he grinned again, as he said:

"Not much sabre, Shorrocks. I should say it was more tatoo than sabre. What do you say to a flesh wound cut around to shape it out, and tatoo to give it colour? What do you say to the old quarter in New York fifty years ago, with the real Cope finished off with opium and Tonks and Ozias Omah very good friends? What do you say to Ozias Omah sitting along with me, his dutiful son and his lawyer, and reading in the newspaper all about the private family history of Joshua Cope—who oughtn't to have had any family history for fifty years—all telegraphed right away—for we have enterprising newspaper people in New York city? And what do you say to the old man starting up pretty much mad and yellin' out 'Shorrocks, by gum; off you go, Silas, to Europe! It's halves,' says he, 'halves, but if Tonks is alive it's thirds. Hunt 'em up, Silas,' says he, 'and smart.' And then his language on the subject of Shorrocks became impolite. It was a partnership, Shorrocks; and it's about time you divided up."

The haggard old man's eyes nearly started out of his head as he listened to this speech, but he said nothing. Then the American added:

"Think it over, Shorrocks; I'll take a seat."

The American's voice was still hoarse, and he coughed to clear his throat as he sat down. Cope turning his head, said in guttural tones:

"You've got a bad cold: so have I. I'm very weak. You must let me think. Come back in an hour. Send in the nurse."

"Why certainly, Shorrocks," said the American. "No one could refuse a reasonable request of that sort. I'll come back

in an hour, and if you're not ready then, we'll have another adjournment. If you're ready earlier, why, send for me. I shall be near the bar."

He soon found the nurse, confidentially remarked that he thought it better to see his friend without compromising her in the eyes of the doctor, told her of the adjournment for an hour, and retired to the bar parlour, where he commenced amusing himself by initiating the florid barmaid in the mysteries of mixing "a corpse reviver" for his refreshment.

The nurse found her patient by no means improved from the visit, but she had not yet acquired sufficient influence over him to scold without making him worse. She merely therefore shook her head at him, stroked her apron, and asked what she could do for him.

"Which is the drawer that holds my clothes?" asked Cope faintly. "That's it at the bottom, eh? Open the drawer, Mrs. Betts, and look for a belt with pockets in it."

The woman did as she was bid, and soon held up a substantial canvas belt with two pockets in it, one on each side.

"Open the pocket on the left side," said Cope, "and you'll find some bank notes. Take 'em out. Now count 'em."

Mrs. Betts counted out ten five pound notes and laid them on the table.

"That's right, Mrs. Betts. Put them into your pocket. Fifty pounds, Mrs. Betts, remember, fifty pounds. If I die they are yours, but remember this, Mrs. Betts," he added with energy, "if I live I'll give you ten five pound notes for every one of those you have. That's five hundred. And now, Mrs. Betts, go to the other pocket; and see what you find."

"A snuff box, sir," answered the woman, who was trembling with emotion at the flood of riches that had unexpectedly come in her road. She would not have been surprised if the snuff box had been full of diamonds, but on opening it as directed, she said it contained lozenges.

"How many?" asked Cope.

"Six," was the answer.

"Put them here on the table beside me, within reach if I had arms to put towards them. Put them nearer," he added, "and so that I can see them."

She did so, and thought she observed a wild scared look in his face, as his eye rested on the lozenges. Then he ruminated, and his mouth and eyebrows twitched, and his eyes glistened with mental excitement. Presently he said :

"Mrs. Betts, you've got the fifty pounds, and you remember the five hundred."

"Yes, sir."

"Then, Mrs. Betts, you'll do as I want you."

"Lor, sir, yes ; but don't look so skeared like."

Cope laughed a hoarse little laugh and said :

"I'm not well to-night, Mrs. Betts, and I feel weaker. I was only wanting you to do a very little thing. If anything happens to me, Mrs. Betts, I want you to put this snuff box and the lozenges into the fire before anyone comes. That's all, Mrs. Betts.

"Oh, yes, sir," said the nurse.

"That's not much, Mrs. Betts."

"Oh, no, sir."

"No," he repeated, "that's not much. It's very little. Now take care of the notes, Mrs. Betts, and mind you do as I say. Keep me alive if you can, Mrs. Betts, but if you can't, then do as I say."

He closed his eyes and seemed to take a little rest, and his face hardened to something like its old form, and he began to mutter to himself and set his teeth ; and Mrs. Betts felt nervous, but more hopeful of her five hundred pounds than she had done a few minutes before, because she knew that this awakening energy was not that of a dying man.

Soon afterwards the American returned, and without waiting to be announced, walked into the room. At the sight of him Cope set to coughing violently, and when he had recovered, told Mrs. Betts to leave the room.

The American walked about in a somewhat masterful manner ; and Cope watched him with curious intentness. At length he said :

"What is it you want of me ?"

"To divide up, my friend."

"Speak plainer : how much do you want ?"

"Five hundred thousand dollars."

"And if I don't give it to you : what then ?"

"I shall go and trade with Eales."

"That won't help you."

"Not as good as tradin' with you, I reckon ; but it'll be better than nothing."

The American coughed.

"All right," said Cope, "we'll trade. Take one of my lozenges, it'll do your throat good, and give me one."

The American put a lozenge into Cope's mouth and two into his own. As he did so, Cope was seized with coughing, and threw his head round on the pillow away from the American ; but the American was tall, and looking over, he saw that the lozenge he had given Cope had fallen out of his mouth, and that the sick man, with a dexterous twist of the neck, had almost hidden it from view. Quick as thought, he spat the two lozenges on the floor, and said :

"Shorrocks, I always follow a good example."

A look of fright passed over Cope's face, as he gasped :
"What ?"

"A good example, Shorrocks. Those lozenges are evidently not good for your digestion, and they may accordingly disagree with me. They remind me of those eggs that the ladies of Brighton succumbed to, eh ? I think I'll take charge of your supply."

And saying this, he took the snuff-box from the table, and with much deliberation picked up the two lozenges he had thrown on the floor. While he was doing this, Cope twisted his head over, recovered the lozenge he had spat on the pillow, and swallowed it.

The American proceeded in a deliberate manner to wrap up the two lozenges in paper before he put them with the rest, accompanying the action with several sarcastic remarks, such as : "I opine a cough is preferable to the medicine." "There are some cures worse than the disease." "Always keep your eyes on Shorrocks is a good rule." With this, he looked up, and found Cope staring at him with glazed eyes, and a hideously distorted face. He was dead.



CHAPTER XXXIX.

SILAS W OMAH "OWNS UP A BUSTED FLUSH."

SILAS W OMAH, Lawyer, of Topeka, Kansas, found himself in a difficult position. To be in the room of a sick and helpless man alone, and to be found there a quarter of an-hour after with the man dead, was a position that required explanation, especially as Silas W Omah held in his hand the instrument of Death ; and more especially since Dr. Prod, Mr. Eales, and the nurse, all appeared in a body at the door before he had sufficiently realised the irksomeness of the situation. He soon recovered, however, and looking at the new comers, said :

"Well, gents, if you had come a little sooner, you might have prevented a catastrophe. Shorrocks has just given in his cheques ; and this snuff-box 'll tell yer how, for I'm derved if I know."

The doctor passed rapidly to the bedside, the nurse turned pale with fright at the sight of the snuff-box in the American's hand, and impulsively crossed the room with a vague idea of getting possession of the box. Eales stood apart, gradually acquiring conception of the incident. Professional instinct caused him to remain with his back to the door.

"I told you, Mr. Eales," said the American, as soon as the first excitement had subsided, "that if my trading with Cope didn't pan out, that I should come back to you ; it has *not* panned out, and it seems you've saved me the trouble of going south. You've been straight and fair with me, Mr. Eales, and I may as well tell you that, now Shorrocks is dead, I'm played out, and propose to find my way back to Topeka, Kansas, right away."

Eales explained he could scarcely do that in the circumstances, and when this had become quite clear to him, he resigned himself to the situation.

The necessary inquiries followed, the nurse confessed to the circumstances of the snuff-box, and its contents explained, not only the death of the patient, but provided the necessary key

to the Brighton mystery. It is needless to add that it opened the door of the condemned cell to Thresher. The British public thereupon commenced a series of indignant remonstrances at the practice of the law, on the assumption that it ought to be omniscient and unerring, notwithstanding it was the creation of the critics themselves. The revulsion of public sentiment was complete, and Isabel became the idol of the hour.

Silas W Omah took a more matter-of-fact view of the situation, and on a subsequent occasion when Eales was urging him to stay, that Thresher might thank him for his part in the business, he replied :

“Mr. Eales, you’ve been very good and straightforward to me, and have won fair. I can’t raise you, Mr. Eales, and I can’t even pay to see ’cause you’ve got a straight flush to an ace, and I’ve nothing but a busted flush knave high. I’ve made a bad draw; and I hope your luck ’ll hold on, as I shan’t be here to steer against it. I didn’t come here to serve you; and I wasn’t extra anxious to help your friend Thresher out of a bad hole, specially because I didn’t know he was in it till I got here. I’m glad he’s likely to be put right, and I’m glad I’ve been the means, but I never meant to do him a good turn, and I’ve no claim on him. Still, as you say he’d like to see me, I’ll stop just to shake hands, and then I’m off.”

“Well, Mr. Omah,” said Eales, suppressing a smile, “I’m not a poker player, and cannot quite appreciate your simile; but I sympathise with you, and I hope my sympathy will not be altogether barren. You’ve come a long journey on a mission of your own, and you have failed by an accident, which you could not control, and which none of us could foresee.”

“Well, sir, I was warned,” said the American, in a melancholy manner. “The last words the old man said to me, as I came away, was a warning, true as any words man spoke. Said he, ‘Silas, boy,’ says he, ‘remember Shorrocks is up to all the cussedness that ever entered the soul of man and more.’ I made a mistake, sir; I should have pretended to swallow those lozenges, as Cope did, and I should not have let him know I saw his on the pillow. That move would have given him fits, eh?”

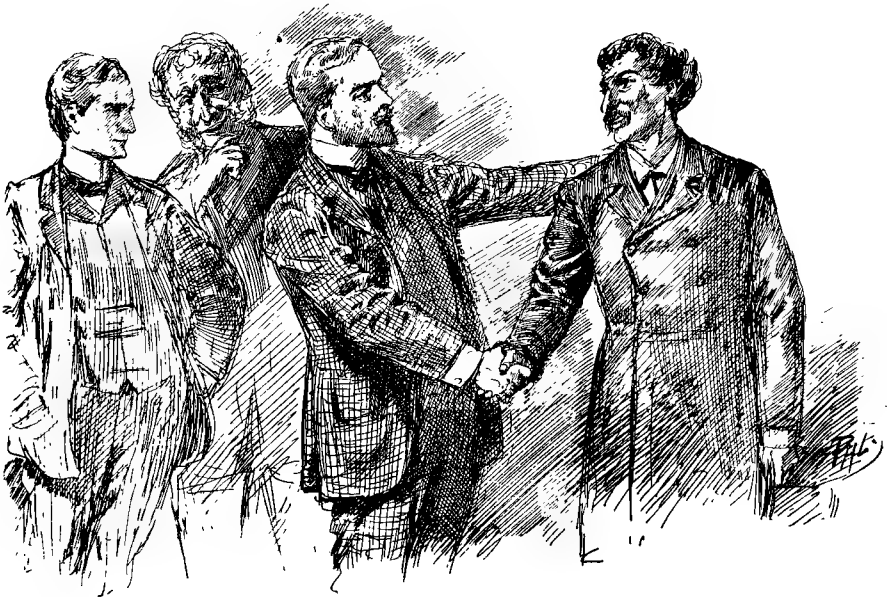
The American was much amused by this reflection, but the melancholy tone returned, as he said :

"But there was more than that. You see that his game was up. What could a man do without feet, and both arms broken, at the age of seventy, and more. He had made up his mind to turn off the steam on the first hitch, and the first hitch came when I saw that lozenge on his pillow. Turn over in your mind, Mr. Eales, where he would have been now, if he hadn't swallowed that lozenge—besides, his arms would not mend—the doctor had told him the bone was past mending. It wouldn't join up."

Omah's interview with Thresher was equally characteristic. He repeated his protestation that he had come with no good intention, but with absolute indifference to Thresher's fate.

"Then," said Thresher, still holding Silas W Omah by the hand, "it is the hand of God."

The American looked at his newly found friend, with a correspondingly serious manner, but with the matter-of-fact habit of his people, he answered :



"Well, sir, I'm not quite sure about the hand of God, unless you think a pair of aces up the sleeve a part of your notion of

that sort of thing. But look here, sir, I'm very glad to see you outside of your Tombs here," he added, heartily shaking Thresher's hand, with both his own; and then with his arms folded across his chest and taking a full survey of the company, he said:

"But, as I told your friend Eales, the other day, I didn't come here to serve you. I came to grind my own axe, and, it's no use to disguise the truth. If I had succeeded, you, my friends, would have been the losers. I'm very glad you're not mad with me for doing my best to win."

They were by no means "mad," and Eales made many proffers of compensation for his time and trouble, all of which Omah refused, saying Eales had played straight and fair, and there was nothing due to him. He left the country in the same mind, made money at poker on the way across the Atlantic, and had only one misgiving—his father's reception of him. It was, however, boisterously cordial, and a positive welcome of praises. Five hundred thousand dollars had been telegraphed to the old man, on the order of Silas W. Omah, and Silas, guessing its origin, came to the conclusion to refrain from explanation. What amazed the old man, however, was that his son had managed so successfully, seeing Shorrocks had poisoned himself. But Silas merely smiled.

Joshua Cope's death affected others. Immediately it came to the ears of Crawley Foyle he sent for Shorter, made him a partner of Schrieber & Co. in five minutes, and thereafter occurred a vigorous burning of partnership accounts on both sides. The wisdom of this activity was apparent shortly afterwards in the smiling countenance and air of repose that characterised the member for Buckton, whose sense of moral rectitude obliged him, so he said, to refrain from intercourse with his daughter, a course that Arthur Foyle, from equally cogent reasons of his own, was mean enough to subscribe to.

As for Shorter, he gradually assumed the manners of a successful City merchant, whose penurious habits were regarded as a natural accompaniment of great wealth. He gave up preaching, but was in hopes of soon becoming another Providence for the correction of the improvident habits of the Foyle family.

Isabel, in the circumstances, was superior to the hypocrisy of mourning, or the affectation of widowhood. She married Thresher in a week from his liberation. Soon afterwards Eales arranged a deed winding up the Tontine for the benefit of old Louison and Miss Winscomb, with remainder to David Thresher in trust for certain benevolent purposes. Miss Winscomb said it seemed like a marriage settlement, and she waited only for the consent of Martha to name the wedding day.



POSTSCRIPT.

A FRIENDLY critic has remarked upon the mechanical contrivance referred to in the twenty-ninth chapter of this book, and has not only objected to the possibility of so constructing a secret doorway in a stone wall, but has still more doubted the possibility of setting up such a contrivance without the fact of the structure becoming notorious through the gossip of the workmen employed. The singular character of the arrangement, it has been pointed out, would have provoked interest and discussion; and the doorway, so far from remaining a secret entrance, would have become an object of special interest and one of the sights of the neighbourhood.

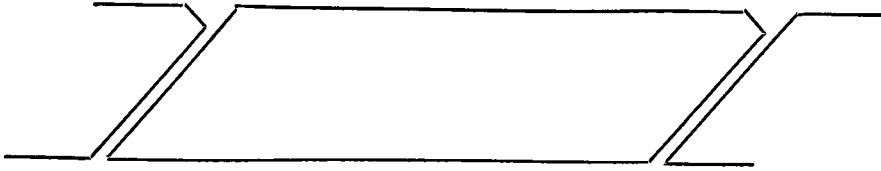
In the absence of a detailed description of the structure, it is more than likely many others would share this view, but the temptation to hamper the story by an elaborate description of the design of the doorway and the manner in which it was put up was successfully resisted, for while a comparatively few may be desirous of wading through half a dozen pages on such a matter, the many prefer that an author should have a due regard for proportion, especially in a work that has been designed to present situations dramatically in the fewest possible words. It is proper, however, to deal with this mechanical curiosity in a postscript for the satisfaction of those who are curious on the subject.

From the plans and papers relating to this matter, carefully preserved in Mr. Louison's library, it appears that when he first conceived the idea of procuring for himself a secret exit from Maida Lodge, he procured through the elder Eales a detailed plan and specification of the door of a strong room, which should open inwards, and the hinge of which should be set back two feet from the plane of the door's face, and six inches from the jamb, so that the hinge would cause the entire doorway to move in a curve on an eccentric axis. He required also that the door should be in the form of a hollow box one foot deep, so that, as he said, he could construct within it a wooden cupboard, which should conceal its character. The fact that he had no intention of doing this was carefully concealed from everyone, even the elder Eales. He acted throughout, indeed, on a principle of intentional concealment of his object, and, as will be seen from what follows, each contributor to this curious structure was employed to do a thing which was in most cases reasonable and intelligible in itself, and, so far as they could judge, a complete job. The specification for the iron doorway to this proposed strong room prescribed that the doorway should run back on rollers, that the iron track on which these rollers ran should be joined to, and if possible, be cast bodily with the frame on which the doorway was hinged, and that the frame was to be so made that it could be built into the left-hand wall of the strong room. All these conditions were complied with, the strong room door was made, paid for, and, having been packed in two separate cases, was warehoused in the south of London, three miles from Maida Lodge.

The next step was to have a wall built round the house, and the contract prescribed that the blocks of stone should all be eighteen inches square by four feet long: they were all to be bevelled two inches on the face and worked so as to show a bevel on the face of two inches all round each stone. What struck the builder as singular on this point was a

POSTSCRIPT.

further stipulation that the bevel should at one end be continued the whole width of the block, while at the other end, it should cease at the end of two inches, and that after this, the stone should be bevelled at right angles to that bevel so as to fit its neighbour. The horizontal section of these stones therefore presented the following singular form.



No stones of any other form and size were to be used, except stones of less length at the corners of the street, and so the wall was built within twelve months of the warehousing of the iron door of the proposed strong room.

When this work was completed, and the contractor had finally removed his workmen and plant, Mr. Louison caused another mason to begin another work—the building of two inner walls at right angles to the outer wall, and so as to connect the outer wall with the house throughout the whole depth of the house. This enclosure, so constructed between the house and the wall, was divided into three separate chambers; and doorways were made to gain access from the gardens to the two outer chambers, but the middle chamber was a sealed vault.

This done, and the workmen dismissed, another mason was called in to make a doorway from the basement of the house into the middle of the three chambers built between the house and the garden wall. Then the iron doorway, after eighteen months' warehousing, was brought to Maida Lodge packed in the two cases, and an exact copy of the box-like door was made in wood for the purpose of easy handling and carried into the inner chamber, where a mason chiselled away various portions of the inside of the five stones and fitted them to occupy and fill the interior of the box-like wooden copy of the door. Thereafter the iron door itself was fitted to the five stones, and joined to them by bolts, and there it stood a fixture and actually a part of the wall.

The next step was the introduction of an engineer to fit the framework of the door, and the first man who came refused the job because he declined to do so absurd a thing as fit up a door that obviously would not move. Another more complaisant engineer was discovered, and the work was done.

The interior arrangements having been thus completed, the final operation of actually opening and swinging the door remained to be done, and it became necessary to do this by the hand of Cheriton alone. An enclosure or hoarding on the outside of the wall was necessary to conceal the operations from the passers by, and to procure this an order was given to a mason to construct a fireplace and chimney in one of the outer chambers. Under cover of this hoarding Mr. Louison and his man Cheriton, between them, passed a saw through the bevelled interstices of the five stones held in the iron door and the work was complete. A little later the unnecessary chimney was removed and the top of it closed with a stone slab.

Altogether, the work was spread over two years, and cost about a thousand pounds, apart from the cost of the wall itself, but time and cost were never considered by Mr. Louison when engaged in working out a scheme that gratified his passion for realising an ingenious and secret enterprise.

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